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1925

GRAND VALLEY STATE COLLEGES



THE GIFT OF

Robert L. Chamberlain

WITHDRAWN

HAY FEVER

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HAY FEVER

A Light Comedy in Three Acts

By
NOEL COWARD



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HAY FEVER

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Wm. of Robert H. Chamberlain

To
LORN LORAINÉ

HAY FEVER

ACT I

CHARACTERS

JUDITH BLISS

DAVID BLISS

SOREL BLISS

SIMON BLISS

MYRA ARUNDEL

RICHARD GREATHAM

JACKIE CORYTON

SANDY TYRELL

CLARA

ACT I. Saturday afternoon

ACT II. Saturday evening

ACT III. Sunday morning

*The action of the play takes place in the hall of
the BLISSES' house at Cookham, in June*

HAY FEVER

ACT I

SCENE: *The hall of DAVID BLISS's house is very comfortable and extremely untidy. There are several of SIMON's cartoons scattered about the walls, masses of highly colored American and classical music strewn about the piano, and lots of flowers and comfortable furniture. A staircase ascends to a small balcony leading to the bedrooms, DAVID's study and SIMON's room. There is a door leading to the library down R. A service door above it under the stairs. There are French windows at back, and the front door on the L.*

When the curtain rises it is about three o'clock on a Saturday afternoon in June.

SIMON, in an extremely dirty tennis shirt and baggy gray flannel trousers, is crouched in the middle of the floor, cutting out squares from cartridge paper.

SOREL, more neatly dressed, is stretched on the sofa, reading a very violently bound volume of poems which has been sent to her by an aspiring friend.

HAY FEVER

SOREL

Listen to this, Simon. [*She reads.*] "Love's a Trollop stained with wine—Clawing at the breasts of Adolescence—Nuzzling, tearing, shrieking, beating—God, why were we fashioned so!" [*She laughs.*]

SIMON

The poor girl's potty.

SOREL

I wish she hadn't sent me the beastly book. I must say something nice about it.

SIMON

The binding's very dashing.

SOREL

She used to be such fun before she married that gloomy little man.

SIMON

She was always a fierce *poseuse*. It's so silly of people to try and cultivate the artistic temperament. *Au fond* she's just a normal, bouncing English-woman.

SOREL

You didn't shave this morning.

SIMON

I know I didn't, but I'm going to in a minute, when I've finished this.

SOREL

I sometimes wish we were more normal and bouncing, Simon.

SIMON

Why?

SOREL

I should like to be a fresh, open-air girl with a passion for games.

SIMON

Thank God you're not.

SOREL

It would be so soothing.

SIMON

Not in this house.

SOREL

Where's mother?

SIMON

In the garden, practicing.

SOREL

Practicing?

SIMON

She's learning the names of the flowers by heart.

SOREL

What's she up to?

SIMON

I don't know.—Damn! that's crooked.

SOREL

I always distrust her when she becomes the Squire's lady.

SIMON

So do I.

SOREL

She's been at it hard all day—she tapped the barometer this morning.

SIMON

She's probably got a plan about impressing somebody.

SOREL [*taking a cigarette*]

I wonder who.

SIMON

Some dreary, infatuated young man will appear soon, I expect.

SOREL

Not to-day? You don't think she's asked anyone down to-day, do you?

SIMON

I don't know. Has father noticed anything?

SOREL

No; he's too immersed in work.

SIMON

Perhaps Clara will know.

SOREL

Yell for her.

HAY FEVER

SIMON [*calling*]

Clara! Clara! . . .

SOREL

Oh, Simon, I *do* hope she hasn't asked anyone down to-day.

SIMON

Why? Have you?

SOREL

Yes.

SIMON [*crossly*]

Why on earth didn't you tell me?

SOREL

I didn't think you'd care one way or another.

SIMON

Who is it?

SOREL

Richard Greatham.

SIMON

How exciting! I've never heard of him.

SOREL

I shouldn't flaunt your ignorance if I were you—it makes you look silly.

SIMON [*rising*]

Well, that's done.

[*He rolls up the cartridge paper.*]

SOREL

Everybody's heard of Richard Greatham.

SIMON [*amiably*]

How lovely for them.

SOREL

He's a frightfully well-known diplomatist—I met him at the Mainwarings' dance.

SIMON

He'll need all his diplomacy here.

SOREL

I warned him not to expect good manners, but I hope you'll be as pleasant to him as you can.

SIMON [*gently*]

I've never met any diplomatists, Sorel, but as a class I'm extremely prejudiced against them. They're so suave and polished and debonair.

SOREL

You could be a little more polished without losing caste.

SIMON

Will he have the papers with him?

SOREL

What papers?

SIMON [*vaguely*]

Oh, any papers.

SOREL

I wish you'd confine your biting irony to your caricatures, Simon.

SIMON

And I wish you'd confine your girlish infatuations to London, and not force them on your defenseless family.

SOREL

I shall keep him out of your way as much as possible.

SIMON

Do, darling.

[Enter CLARA. *She is a hot, round, untidy little woman.*]

SIMON

Clara, has mother asked anyone down this weekend?

CLARA

I don't know, dear. There isn't much food in the house, and Amy's got toothache.

SOREL

I've got some oil of cloves somewhere.

CLARA

She tried that, but it only burnt her tongue. The poor girl's been writhing about in the scullery like one o'clock.

SOREL

You haven't forgotten to put those flowers in the Japanese room?

SIMON

The Japanese room is essentially feminine, and entirely unsuited to the Pet of the Foreign Office.

SOREL

Shut up, Simon.

CLARA

The room looks lovely, dear—you needn't worry. Just like your mother's dressing-room on a first night.

SIMON

How restful!

CLARA [*to SOREL*]

Have you told her about your boy friend?

SOREL [*pained*]

Not boy friend, Clara.

CLARA [*going round, picking up things*]

Oh, well, whatever he is.

SIMON

I think Sorel's beginning to be ashamed of us all, Clara—I don't altogether blame her; we are very slapdash.

CLARA

Are you going to leave that picture in the guests' bathroom, dear? I don't know if it's quite the thing—lots of pink, naked women rolling about in a field.

SIMON [*severely*]

Nudity can be very beautiful, Clara.

CLARA

Oh, can it! Perhaps being a dresser for so long 'as spoilt me eye for it. [*She goes out.*]

SIMON

Clara's looking tired. We ought to have more servants and not depend on her so much.

SOREL

You know we can never keep them. You're right about us being slapdash, Simon. I wish we weren't.

SIMON

Does it matter?

SOREL

It must, I think—to other people.

SIMON

It's not our fault—it's the way we've been brought up.

SOREL

Well, if we're clever enough to realize that, we ought to be clever enough to change ourselves.

SIMON

I'm not sure that I want to.

SOREL

We're so awfully bad-mannered.

SIMON

Not to people we like.

SOREL

The people we like put up with it because they like us.

SIMON

What do you mean, exactly, by bad manners? Lack of social tricks and small-talk?

SOREL

We never attempt to look after people when they come here.

SIMON

Why should we? It's loathsome being looked after.

SOREL

Yes, but people like little attentions. We've never once asked anyone if they've slept well.

SIMON

I consider that an impertinence, anyhow.

SOREL

I'm going to try to improve.

SIMON

You're only going on like this because you've got a mania for a diplomatist. You'll soon return to normal.

SOREL [*earnestly*]

Abnormal, Simon—that's what we are. Abnormal. People stare in astonishment when we say what

we consider perfectly ordinary things. I just remarked at Freda's lunch the other day how nice it would be if some one invented something to make all our faces go up like the Chinese, because I was so bored with them going down—and they all thought I was mad!

SIMON

It's no use worrying, darling; we see things differently, I suppose, and if people don't like it they must lump it.

SOREL

Mother's been awfully restless lately.

SIMON

Yes, I know.

SOREL

Life must be terribly dull for her now, with nothing to do.

SIMON

She'll go back soon, I expect; people never retire from the stage for long.

SOREL

Father will be livid if she does.

SIMON

That won't matter.

[Enter JUDITH from the garden. She is carrying an armful of flowers and wearing a teagown, a large garden hat, gauntlet gloves, and goloshes.]

JUDITH

You look awfully dirty, Simon. What have you been doing?

SIMON [*nonchalantly*]

Not washing very much.

JUDITH

You should, darling, really. It's so bad for your skin to leave things about on it. [*She proceeds to take off her goloshes.*]

SOREL

Clara says Amy's got toothache.

JUDITH

Poor dear! There's some oil of cloves in my medicine cupboard. Who is Amy?

SOREL

The scullery maid, I think.

JUDITH

How extraordinary! She doesn't look Amy a bit, does she? Much more Flossie.—Give me a cigarette. [SOREL *gives her a cigarette and lights it.*] Delphiniums are those stubby red flowers, aren't they?

SIMON

No, darling, they're tall and blue.

JUDITH

Yes, of course. The red ones are somebody's name—asters, that's it. I knew it was something opulent. I do hope Clara has remembered about the Japanese room.

SOREL

Japanese room!

JUDITH

Yes; I told her to put some flowers in it and take Simon's flannels out of the wardrobe drawer.

SOREL

So did I.

JUDITH [*ominously*]

Why?

SOREL [*airily*]

I've asked Richard Greatham down for the week-end—I didn't think you'd mind.

JUDITH

Mind! How dared you do such a thing?

SOREL

He's a diplomatist.

JUDITH

That makes it much worse. We must wire and put him off at once.

SOREL

It's too late.

JUDITH

Well, we'll tell Clara to say we've been called away.

SOREL

That would be extremely rude, and, anyhow, I *want* to see him.

JUDITH

You mean to stand there in cold blood and tell me you've asked a complete stranger down for the week end, and that you want to see him!

SOREL

I've often done it before.

JUDITH

I fail to see how that helps matters. Where's he going to sleep?

SOREL

The Japanese room.

JUDITH

Oh no, he isn't—Sandy Tyrell is sleeping in it.

SIMON

There now! What did I tell you?

SOREL

Sandy—what?

JUDITH

Tyrell, dear.

SIMON

Why didn't you tell us, mother?

JUDITH

I did. I've talked of nothing but Sandy Tyrell for days. I adore Sandy Tyrell.

SIMON

You've never mentioned him.

SOREL

Who is he, mother?

JUDITH

He's a perfect darling, and madly in love with me—at least, it isn't me really, it's my Celebrated Actress glamour—but it gives me a divinely cozy feeling. I met him at Nora Trent's.

SOREL

Mother, I wish you'd give up this sort of thing.

JUDITH

What exactly do you mean by "this sort of thing," Sorel?

SOREL

You know perfectly well what I mean.

JUDITH

Are you attempting to criticize me?

SOREL

I should have thought you'd be above encouraging silly, callow young men who are infatuated by your name.

JUDITH

That may be true, but I shall allow nobody but myself to say it. I hoped you'd grow up a good daughter to me, not a critical aunt.

SOREL

It's so terribly cheap.

JUDITH

Cheap! Nonsense! What about your diplomatist?

SOREL

Surely that's a little different, dear?

JUDITH

If you mean that because you happen to be a vigorous *ingénue* of nineteen you have the complete monopoly of any amorous adventure there may be about, I feel it my firm duty to disillusion you.

SOREL

But, mother——

JUDITH

Anyone would think I was eighty, the way you go on. It was a great mistake not sending you to boarding schools, and you coming back and me being your elder sister.

SIMON

It wouldn't have been any use. Everyone knows we're your son and daughter.

JUDITH

Only because I was stupid enough to dandle you about in front of cameras when you were little. I knew I should regret it.

SIMON

I don't see any point in trying to be younger than you are.

JUDITH

At your age, dear, it would be indecent if you did.

SOREL

But, mother darling, don't you see, it's awfully undignified for you to go flaunting about with young men?

JUDITH

I don't flaunt about—I never have. I've been morally an extremely nice woman all my life—more or less—and if dabbling gives me pleasure, I don't see why I shouldn't dabble.

SOREL

But it oughtn't to give you pleasure any more.

JUDITH

You know, Sorel, you grow more damnably feminine every day. I wish I'd brought you up differently.

SOREL

I'm proud of being feminine.

JUDITH [*kissing her*]

You're a darling, and I adore you; and you're very pretty, and I'm madly jealous of you.

SOREL [*with her arms round her*]

Are you really? How lovely.

JUDITH

You will be nice to Sandy, won't you?

SOREL [*breaking away*]

Can't he sleep in "Little Hell"?

JUDITH

My dear, he's frightfully athletic, and all those hot-water pipes will sap his vitality.

SOREL

They'll sap Richard's vitality too.

JUDITH

He won't notice them; he's probably used to scorching tropical embassies with punkahs waving and everything.

SIMON

He's sure to be deadly, anyhow.

SOREL

You're getting far too *blasé* and exclusive, Simon.

SIMON

Nothing of the sort. Only I loathe being hearty with your men friends.

SOREL

You've never been even civil to any of my friends men or women.

JUDITH

Don't bicker.

SIMON

Anyhow, the Japanese room's a woman's room and a woman ought to have it.

JUDITH

I promised it to Sandy—he loves anything Japanese.

SIMON

So does Myra.

JUDITH

Myra!

SIMON

Myra Arundel. I've asked her down.

JUDITH

You've—what?

SIMON

I've asked Myra down for the week-end—she's awfully amusing.

SOREL

Well, all I can say is, it's beastly of you. You might have warned me. What on earth will Richard say?

SIMON

Something exquisitely non-committal, I expect.

JUDITH

This is too much! Do you mean to tell me, Simon——

SIMON [*firmly*]

Yes, mother, I do. I've asked Myra down, and I have a perfect right to. You've always brought us up to be free about things.

JUDITH

Myra Arundel is straining freedom to its utmost limits.

SIMON

Don't you like her?

JUDITH

No, dear, I detest her. She's far too old for you, and she goes about using Sex as a sort of shrimping net.

SIMON

Really, mother——!

JUDITH

It's no use being cross. You know perfectly well I dislike her, and that's why you never told me she was coming until too late to stop her. It's intolerable of you.

SOREL [*grandly*]

Whether she's here or not is a matter of extreme indifference to me, but I'm afraid Richard won't like her very much.

SIMON

You're afraid he'll like her too much.

SOREL

That was an offensive remark, Simon, and rather silly.

JUDITH [*plaintively*]

Why on earth don't you fall in love with nice young girls, instead of self-conscious vampires?

SIMON

She's not a vampire, and I never said I was in love with her.

SOREL

He's crazy about her. She butters him up and admires his sketches.

SIMON

What about you picking up old gentlemen at dances?

SOREL [*furiously*]

He's *not* old!

JUDITH

You've both upset me thoroughly. I wanted a nice, restful week-end, with moments of Sandy's ingenuous affection to warm the cockles of my heart when I felt in the mood, and now the house is going to be full of discord—not enough food, everyone fighting for the bath—perfect agony! I wish I were dead!

SIMON

You needn't worry about Myra and me. We shall keep out of everyone's way.

SOREL

I shall take Richard on the river all day tomorrow.

JUDITH

In what?

SOREL

The punt.

JUDITH

I absolutely forbid you to go near the punt.

SIMON

It's sure to rain, anyhow.

JUDITH

What your father will say I tremble to think. He needs complete quiet to finish off *The Sinful Woman*.

SOREL

I see no reason for there to be any noise, unless Sandy What's-his-name is given to shouting.

JUDITH

If you're rude to Sandy I shall be extremely angry.

[*Together.*]

SOREL

Now, look here, mother——

SIMON

Why you should expect——

JUDITH

He's coming all the way down specially to be nice to me——

[*Enter DAVID down stairs. He looks slightly irritable.*]

DAVID

Why are you all making such a noise?

JUDITH

I think I'm going mad.

DAVID

Why hasn't Clara brought me my tea?

JUDITH

I don't know.

DAVID

Where is Clara?

JUDITH

Do stop firing questions at me, David.

DAVID

Why are you all so irritable? What's happened?
[*Enter CLARA, with a tray of tea for one.*]

CLARA

Here's your tea. I'm sorry I'm late with it. Amy forgot to put the kettle on—she's got terrible tooth-ache.

DAVID

Poor girl! Give her some oil of cloves.

SOREL

If anyone else mentions oil of cloves, I shall do something desperate.

DAVID

It's wonderful stuff. Where's Zoe?

SIMON

She was in the garden this morning.

DAVID

I suppose no one thought of giving her any lunch?

CLARA

I put it down by the kitchen table as usual, but she never came in for it.

SOREL

She's probably mousing.

DAVID

She isn't old enough yet. She might have fallen into the river, for all you care. I think it's a shame!

CLARA

Don't you worry your head—Zoe won't come to any harm; she's too wily.

DAVID

I don't want to be disturbed. [*He takes his tray and goes upstairs; then he turns.*] Listen, Simon. There's a perfectly sweet flapper coming down by the four-thirty. Will you go and meet her and be

nice to her? She's an abject fool, but a useful type, and I want to study her a little in domestic surroundings. She can sleep in the Japanese room.
[*He goes off, leaving behind him a deathly silence.*]

JUDITH

I should like some one to play something very beautiful to me on the piano.

SIMON

Damn everything! Damn! Damn! Damn!

SOREL

Swearing doesn't help.

SIMON

It helps me a lot.

SOREL

What does father mean by going on like that?

JUDITH

In view of the imminent reception, you'd better go and shave, Simon.

SOREL [*bursting into tears of rage*]

It's perfectly beastly! Whenever I make any sort of plan about anything it's always done in by some one. I wish I were earning my own living somewhere—a free agent—able to do whatever I liked without being cluttered up and frustrated by the family——

JUDITH [*picturesquely*]

It grieves me to hear you say that, Sorel.

SOREL

Don't be infuriating, mother.

JUDITH [*sadly*]

A change has come over my children of late. I have tried to shut my eyes to it, but in vain. At my time of life one must face bitter facts!

SIMON

This is going to be the blackest Saturday till Monday we've ever spent.

JUDITH [*tenderly*]

Sorel, you mustn't cry.

SOREL

Don't sympathize with me; it's only temper.

JUDITH [*clasping her*]

Put your head on my shoulder, dear.

SIMON [*bitterly*]

Your head like the golden fleece . . .

SOREL

Richard'll have to have "Little Hell" and that horrible flapper the Japanese room.

JUDITH

Over my dead body!

SIMON

Mother, what *are* we to do?

JUDITH [*drawing him forcibly into her arms so that there is a charming little motherly picture*]

We must be all be very, very kind to everyone!

SIMON

Now then, mother, none of that!

JUDITH [*aggrieved*]

I don't know what you mean, Simon.

SIMON

You were being beautiful and sad.

JUDITH

But I am beautiful and sad.

SIMON

You're not particularly beautiful, darling, and you never were.

JUDITH [*glancing at herself in the glass*]

Never mind; I made thousands think I was.

SIMON

And as for being sad——

JUDITH

Now, Simon, I will not be dictated to like this. If I say I'm sad, I *am* sad. You don't understand, because you're precocious and tiresome. . . . There comes a time in all women's lives——

SOREL

Oh dear!

JUDITH

What did you say, Sorel?

SOREL [*recovering*]

I said, "Oh dear!"

JUDITH

Well, please don't say it again, because it annoys me.

SOREL

You're such a lovely hypocrite.

JUDITH [*casting up her eyes*]

I'm sure I don't know what I've done to be cursed with such ungrateful children. It's very cruel at my time of life——

SIMON

There you go again!

JUDITH [*inconsequently*]

You're getting far too tall, Sorel.

SOREL

Sorry, mother.

JUDITH

Give me another of those disgusting cigarettes—I don't know where they came from.

SIMON [*giving her one*]

Here. [*He lights it for her.*]

JUDITH

I'm going to forget entirely about all these dreadful people arriving. My mind henceforward shall be a blank on the subject.

SOREL

It's all very fine, mother, but——

JUDITH

I made a great decision this morning.

SIMON

What kind of decision?

JUDITH

It's a secret.

SOREL

Aren't you going to tell us?

JUDITH

Of course. I meant it was a secret from your father.

SIMON

What is it?

JUDITH

I'm going back to the stage.

SIMON

I knew it!

JUDITH

I'm stagnating, you see. I won't stagnate as long as there's breath left in my body.

SOREL

Do you think it's wise? You retired so very finally last year. What excuse will you give for returning so soon?

JUDITH

My public, dear—letters from my public!

SIMON

Have you had any?

JUDITH

One or two. That's what decided me, really—I ought to have had hundreds.

SOREL

We'll write some lovely ones, and you can publish them in the papers.

JUDITH

Of course.

SOREL

You will be dignified about it all, won't you, darling?

JUDITH

I'm much more dignified on the stage than in the country—it's my *milieu*. I've tried terribly hard to be "landed gentry," but without any real success. I long for excitement and glamour. Think of the thrill of a first night; all those ardent playgoers willing one to succeed; the critics all leaning forward with glowing faces, receptive and exultant—emitting

queer little inarticulate noises as some witty line tickles their fancy. The satisfied grunt of the *Daily Mail*, the abandoned gurgle of the *Sunday Times*, and the shrill, enthusiastic scream of the *Daily Express*! I can distinguish them all——

SIMON

Have you got a play?

JUDITH

I think I shall revive "Love's Whirlwind."

SOREL [*collapsing on to sofa*]

Oh, mother! [*She gurgles with laughter.*]

SIMON [*weakly*]

Father will be furious.

JUDITH

I can't help that.

SOREL

It's such a fearful play.

JUDITH

It's a marvelous part. You mustn't say too much against it, Sorel. I'm willing to laugh at it a little

myself, but, after all, it *was* one of my greatest successes.

SIMON

Oh, it's appalling—but I love it. It makes me laugh.

JUDITH

The public love it too, and it doesn't make them laugh—much. [*She recites.*] "You are a fool, a blind, pitiable fool. You think because you have bought my body that you have bought my soul!" You must say that's dramatic.—"I've dreamed of love like this, but I never realized, I never knew how beautiful it could be in reality!" That line always brought a tear to my eye.

SIMON

The second act *is* the best, there's no doubt about that.

JUDITH

From the moment Victor comes in it's strong—tremendously strong. . . . Be Victor a minute, Sorel——

SOREL

Do you mean when he comes in at the end of the act?

JUDITH

Yes, you know—"Is this a game?"

SOREL [*with feeling*]

"Is this a game?"

JUDITH [*with spirit*]

"Yes—and a game that must be played to the finish."

SIMON

"Zara, what does this mean?"

JUDITH

"So many illusions shattered—so many dreams trodden in the dust!"

SOREL

I'm George now—"I don't understand! You and Victor—My God!"

JUDITH

"Sssh! Isn't that little Pam crying?"

SIMON [*savagely*]

"She'll cry more, poor mite, when she realizes her mother is a——"

JUDITH [*shrieking*]

"Don't say it—don't say it!"

SOREL

"Spare her that."

JUDITH

"I've given you all that makes life worth living—my youth, my womanhood, and now my child. Would you tear the very heart out of me? I tell you that it's infamous that men like you should be allowed to pollute society. You have ruined my life—I have nothing left—nothing. God in heaven, where am I to turn for help. . . ."

SOREL [*through clenched teeth*]

"Is this true? Answer me—is this true?"

JUDITH [*wailing*]

"Yes, yes!"

SOREL [*springing at SIMON*]

"You cur!"

[*The front door bell rings.*]

JUDITH

Damn! There's the bell.

SOREL [*rushing to the glass*]

I look hideous!

SIMON

Yes, dear.

[CLARA *enters.*]

JUDITH

Clara—before you open the door—we shall be eight for dinner.

CLARA

My God!

SIMON

And for breakfast, lunch, tea, and dinner to-morrow.

JUDITH [*vaguely*]

Will you get various rooms ready?

CLARA

I shall have to—they can't sleep in the passage.

SOREL

How we've upset Clara.

JUDITH

It can't be helped—nothing can be helped. It's fate—everything that happens is fate. That's always a great comfort to me.

CLARA

More like arrant selfishness.

JUDITH

You mustn't be pert, Clara.

CLARA

Pert I may be, but I've got some thought for others. Eight for dinner—Amy going home early. It's more nor less than an imposition.

[The bell rings again.]

SIMON

Hadn't you better let them all in?

[CLARA goes to the front door and admits SANDY TYRELL, who is a fresh-looking young man; he has an unspoiled, youthful sense of honor and rather big hands, owing to a misplaced enthusiasm for amateur boxing. CLARA goes out.]

SANDY [*to JUDITH*]

I say, it's perfectly ripping of you to let me come down.

JUDITH

Are you alone?

SANDY [*surprised*]

Yes.

JUDITH

I mean, you didn't meet anyone at the station?

SANDY

I motored down; my car's outside. Would you like me to meet anybody?

JUDITH

Oh no. I must introduce you. This is my daughter Sorel, and my son Simon.

SANDY [*shaking hands*]

How-do-you-do. /

SOREL [*coldly*]

I'm extremely well, thank you, and I hope you are.

SIMON

So do I.

[They both go upstairs rather grandly. SANDY looks shattered.]

JUDITH

You must forgive me for having rather peculiar children. Have you got a bag or anything?

SANDY

Yes; it's in the car.

JUDITH

We'd better leave it there for the moment, as Clara has to get the tea. We'll find you a room afterwards.

SANDY

I've been looking forward to this most awfully.

JUDITH

It is nice, isn't it? You can see as far as Marlow on a clear day, they tell me.

SANDY

I meant I've been looking forward to seeing you.

JUDITH

How perfectly sweet of you. Would you like a drink?

SANDY

No, thanks. I'm in training.

JUDITH [*sitting on sofa and motioning him to sit beside her*]

How lovely. What for?

SANDY

I'm boxing again in a couple of weeks.

JUDITH

I must come to your first night.

SANDY

You look simply splendid.

JUDITH

I'm so glad. You know, you mustn't mind if Simon and Sorel insult you a little—they've been very bad-tempered lately.

SANDY

It's awfully funny you having a grown-up son and daughter at all. I can hardly believe it.

JUDITH [*quickly*]

I was married very young.

SANDY

I don't wonder. You know, it's frightfully queer the way I've been planning to know you for ages, and I never did until last week.

JUDITH

I liked you from the first, really, because you're such a nice shape.

SANDY [*slightly embarrassed*]

Oh, I see . . .

JUDITH

Small hips and lovely long legs—I wish Simon had smaller hips. Do you think you could teach him to box?

SANDY

Rather—if he likes.

JUDITH

That's just the trouble—I'm afraid he won't like. He's so dreadfully un——that sort of thing. But never mind; you must use your influence subtly. I'm sure David would be pleased.

SANDY

Who's David?

JUDITH

My husband.

SANDY [*surprised*]

Oh!

JUDITH

Why do you say "Oh" like that? Didn't you know I had a husband?

SANDY

I thought he was dead.

JUDITH

No, he's not dead; he's upstairs.

SANDY

You're quite different from what you were the other day.

JUDITH

It's this garden hat—I'll take it off. [*She does so.*] There. I've been pruning the calceolarias.

SANDY [*puzzled*]

Oh?——

JUDITH

I love my garden, you know—it's so peaceful and quaint. I spend long days dreaming away in it—you know how one dreams.

SANDY

Oh yes.

JUDITH [*warming up*]

I always longed to leave the brittle glamour of cities and theaters and find rest in some Old World nook. That's why we came to Cookham.

SANDY

It's awfully nice—Cookham.

JUDITH

Have you ever seen me on the stage?

SANDY

Rather!

JUDITH

What in?

SANDY

That thing when you pretended to cheat at cards to save your husband's good name.

JUDITH

Oh, "The Bold Deceiver." That play was never quite right.

SANDY

You were absolutely wonderful. That was when I first fell in love with you.

JUDITH [*delighted*]

Was it, really?

SANDY

Yes; you were so frightfully pathetic and brave.

JUDITH [*basking*]

Was I?

SANDY

Rather!

[*There is a pause.*]

JUDITH

Well, go on. . . .

SANDY

I feel such a fool, telling you what I think, as though it mattered.

JUDITH

Of course it matters—to me, anyhow.

SANDY

Does it—honestly?

JUDITH

Certainly.

SANDY

It seems too good to be true—sitting here and talking as though we were old friends.

JUDITH

We *are* old friends—we probably met in another life. Reincarnation, you know—fascinating!

SANDY

You do say ripping things.

JUDITH

Do I? Give me a cigarette and let's put our feet up.

SANDY

All right.

[They settle themselves comfortably at opposite ends of the sofa, smoking.]

JUDITH

Can you punt?

SANDY

Yes—a bit.

JUDITH

You must teach Simon—he always gets the pole stuck.

SANDY

I'd rather teach you.

JUDITH

You're so gallant and chivalrous—much more like an American than an Englishman.

SANDY

I should like to go on saying nice things to you forever.

JUDITH [*giving him her hand*]

Sandy! [*There comes a loud ring at the bell.*
JUDITH *jumps.*] There now!

SANDY

Is anyone else coming to stay?

JUDITH

Anyone else! You don't know—you just don't know. Give me my hat.

SANDY [*giving it to her*]

You said it would be quite quiet, with nobody at all.

JUDITH

I was wrong. It's going to be very noisy, with herds of angry people stamping about.

[CLARA *enters and opens the front door.* MYRA ARUNDEL *is posed outside, consciously well dressed, with several suitcases and a tennis racquet.*]

MYRA [*advancing*]

Judith—my—dear—this is divine!

JUDITH [*emptily*]

Too, too lovely.—Where are the others?

MYRA

What others?

[CLARA *goes out.*]

JUDITH

Did you come by the four-thirty?

MYRA

Yes.

JUDITH

Didn't you see anyone at the station?

MYRA

Yes; several people, but I didn't know they were coming here.

JUDITH

Well, they are.

MYRA

Sorel said it was going to be just ourselves this week-end.

JUDITH [*sharply*]

Sorel?

MYRA

Yes—didn't she tell you she'd asked me? Weren't you expecting me?

JUDITH

Simon muttered something about your coming, but Sorel didn't mention it. Wasn't that odd of her?

MYRA

You're a divinely mad family. [*To SANDY.*] How do-you-do? It's useless to wait for introductions with the Blisses. My name's Myra Arundel.

JUDITH [*airily*]

Sandy Tyrell, Myra Arundel; Myra Arundel, Sandy Tyrell. There.

MYRA

Is that your car outside?

SANDY

Yes.

MYRA

Well, Judith, I *do* think you might have told me someone was motoring down. A nice car would have been so much more comfortable than that beastly train.

JUDITH

I never knew you were coming until a little while ago.

MYRA

It's heavenly here—after London. The heat was terrible when I left. You look awfully well, Judith. Rusticating obviously agrees with you.

JUDITH

I'm glad you think so. Personally, I feel that a nervous breakdown is imminent.

MYRA

My dear, how ghastly! What's the matter?

JUDITH

Nothing's the matter yet, Myra, but I have pre-sentiments. Come upstairs, Sandy, and I'll show you your room. [*She begins to go upstairs, followed by SANDY. Then she turns.*] I'll send Simon down to you. He's shaving, I think, but you won't mind that, will you?

[*She goes off. MYRA makes a slight grimace after her, then she helps herself to a cigarette and wanders about the hall—she might almost play the piano a little; anyhow, she is perfectly at home.*]

[*SIMON comes downstairs very fast, putting on his coat. He has apparently finished his toilet.*]

SIMON

Myra, this is marvelous!

[*He tries to kiss her.*]

MYRA [*pushing him away*]

No, Simon dear; it's too hot.

SIMON

You look beautifully cool.

MYRA .

I'm more than cool really, but it's not climatic coolness. I've been mentally chilled to the marrow by Judith's attitude.

SIMON

Why, what did she say?

MYRA

Nothing very much. She was bouncing about on the sofa with a hearty young thing in flannels, and seemed to resent my appearance rather.

SIMON

You mustn't take any notice of mother.

MYRA

I'll try not to, but it's difficult.

SIMON

She adores you, really.

MYRA

I'm sure she does.

SIMON

She's annoyed to-day because father and Sorel have been asking people down without telling her.

MYRA

Poor dear! I quite see why.

SIMON

You look enchanting.

MYRA

Thank you, Simon.

SIMON

Are you pleased to see me?

MYRA

Of course. That's why I came.

SIMON

Darling!

MYRA

Sssh! Don't shout.

SIMON

I feel most colossally temperamental—I should like to kiss you and kiss you and kiss you and break everything in the house and then jump into the river.

MYRA

Dear Simon!

SIMON

You're everything I want you to be—absolutely everything. Marvelous clothes, marvelous looks, marvelous brain—Oh, God, it's terrible. . . .

MYRA

I dined with Charlie Templeton last night.

SIMON

Well, you're a devil. You only did it to annoy me. He's far too plump, and he can't do anything but dither about the Embassy in badly cut trousers. You loathe him, really; you know you do—you're too intelligent not to. You couldn't like him and me at the same time—it's impossible!

MYRA

Don't be so conceited.

SIMON

Darling—I adore you.

MYRA

That's right.

SIMON

But you're callous—that's what it is, callous! You don't care a damn. You don't love me a bit, do you?

MYRA

Love's a very big word, Simon.

SIMON

It isn't—it's tiny. What are we to do?

MYRA

What do you mean?

SIMON

We can't go on like this.

MYRA

I'm not going on like anything.

SIMON

Yes, you are; you're going on like Medusa, and there are awful snakes popping their heads out at me from under your hat—I shall be turned to stone in a minute, and then you'll be sorry.

MYRA [*laughing*]

You're very sweet, and I'm *very* fond of you.

SIMON

Tell me what you've been doing—everything.

MYRA

Nothing.

SIMON

What did you do after you'd dined with Charlie Templeton?

MYRA

Supped with Charlie Templeton.

SIMON

Well, I don't mind a bit. I hope you ate a lot and enjoyed yourself—there!

MYRA

Generous boy! Come and kiss me.

SIMON

You're only playing up to me now; you don't really want to a bit.

MYRA

I'm aching for it.

SIMON [*kissing her violently*]

I love you.

MYRA

This week-end's going to be strenuous.

SIMON

Hell upon earth—fifteen million people in the house. We'll get up at seven and rush away down the river.

MYRA

No, we won't.

SIMON

Don't let either of us agree to anything we say—we'll both be difficult. I love being difficult.

MYRA

You certainly do.

SIMON

But I'm in the most lovely mood now. Just seeing you makes me feel grand——

MYRA

Is your father here?

SIMON

Yes; he's working on a new novel.

MYRA

He writes brilliantly.

SIMON

Doesn't he? He drinks too much tea, though.

MYRA

It can't do him much harm, surely?

SIMON

It tans the stomach.

MYRA

Who is Sandy Tyrell?

SIMON

Never heard of him.

MYRA

He's here, with Judith.

SIMON

Oh, that poor thing with hot hands! We'll ignore him.

MYRA

I thought he looked rather nice.

SIMON

You must be mad. He looked disgusting.

MYRA [*laughing*]

Idiot!

SIMON [*flinging himself on the sofa*]

Smooth my hair with your soft white hands.

MYRA [*ruffling it*]

It's got glue on it.

SIMON [*catching her hand and kissing it*]

You smell heavenly. What is it?

MYRA

Borgia of Rosine.

SIMON

How appropriate.

[*He pulls her down and kisses her.*]

MYRA [*breaking away*]

You're too demonstrative to-day, Simon.

[*The front door bell rings.*]

SIMON

Damn, damn! It's those drearies.

[*MYRA powders her nose as CLARA crosses to open door. RICHARD GREATHAM and JACKIE CORYTON come in. There is, by this time, a good deal of luggage on the step. RICHARD is iron-gray and tall; JACKIE is small and shingled, with an ingenuous manner which will lose its charm as she grows older.*]

RICHARD

This is Mrs. Bliss's house.

CLARA [*offhand*]

Oh yes, this is it.

RICHARD

Is Miss Sorel Bliss in?

CLARA

I expect so. I'll see if I can find her.

[*She goes upstairs, humming a tune.*]

SIMON

Hallo. Did you have a nice journey?

RICHARD

Yes, thank you, very nice. I met Miss Coryton at the station. We introduced ourselves while we were waiting for the only taxi to come back.

MRS.

Oh, I took the only taxi. How marvellous of me.

RICHARD

Mrs. Arnold! How-do-you-do. I never recognised you.

[*They shake hands.*]

HAY FEVER

JACKIE

I did.

MYRA

Why? Have we met anywhere?

JACKIE

No: I mean I recognized you as the one who took the taxi.

RICHARD [*to SIMON*]

You are Sorel's brother?

SIMON

Yes: she'll be down in a minute. Come out into the garden, Myra——

MYRA

But, Simon, we can't. . . .

SIMON [*grabbing her hand and dragging her off*]

Yes, we can. I shall go mad if I stay in the house a moment longer. [*Over his shoulder to RICHARD and JACKIE.*] Tea will be here soon.
[*He and MYRA go off.*]

JACKIE

Well!

RICHARD

A strange young man.

JACKIE

Very rude, I think.

RICHARD

Have you ever met him before?

JACKIE

No: I don't know any of them except Mr. Bliss—
he's a wonderful person.

RICHARD

I wonder if he knows you're here.

JACKIE

Perhaps that funny woman who opened the door
will tell him.

RICHARD

It was fortunate that we met at the station.

JACKIE

I'm frightfully glad. I should have been terrific arriving all by myself.

RICHARD

I do hope the weather will keep good over Sunday—the country round here is delightful.

JACKIE

Yes.

RICHARD

There's nowhere like England in the spring and summer.

JACKIE

No, there isn't, is there?

RICHARD

There's a sort of *quality* you find in no other countries.

JACKIE

Have you traveled a lot?

RICHARD [*modestly*]

A good deal.

JACKIE

How lovely.

[There is a pause.]

RICHARD

Spain is very beautiful.

JACKIE

Yes, I've always heard Spain was awfully nice.

RICHARD

Except for the bull-fights. No one who ever really loved horses could enjoy a bull-fight.

JACKIE

Nor anyone who loved bulls, either.

RICHARD

Exactly.

JACKIE

Italy's awfully nice, isn't it?

RICHARD

Oh yes, charming.

JACKIE

I've always wanted to go to Italy.

RICHARD

Rome is a beautiful city.

JACKIE

Yes, I've always heard Rome was lovely.

RICHARD

And Naples and Capri—Capri's enchanting.

JACKIE

It must be.

RICHARD

Have you ever been abroad at all?

JACKIE

Oh yes; I went to Dieppe once—we had a house there for the summer.

RICHARD [*kindly*]

Dear little place—Dieppe.

JACKIE

Yes, it was lovely.

[JUDITH comes downstairs, followed by SANDY, with his arms full of cushions. She motions him out into the garden, sits down and puts on her goloshes, and then follows him.]

JACKIE

Well!

RICHARD

Russia used to be a wonderful country before the war.

JACKIE

It must have been. . . . Was that her?

RICHARD

Who?

JACKIE

Judith Bliss.

RICHARD

Yes, I expect it was.

JACKIE

I wish I'd never come.

RICHARD

You mustn't worry. They're a very Bohemian family, I believe.

JACKIE

I wonder if Mr. Bliss knows I'm here.

RICHARD

I wonder.

JACKIE

Couldn't we ring a bell, or anything?

RICHARD

Yes, perhaps we'd better.
[*He finds bell and presses it.*]

JACKIE

I don't suppose it rings.

RICHARD

You mustn't be depressed.

JACKIE

I feel horrid.

RICHARD

It's always a little embarrassing coming to a strange house for the first time. You'll like Sorel—she's charming.

JACKIE [*desperately*]

I wonder where she is.

RICHARD [*consolingly*]

I expect tea will be here soon.

JACKIE

Do you think they *have* tea?

RICHARD [*alarmed*]

Oh yes—they must.

JACKIE

Oh, well, we'd better go on waiting, then.

[*She sits down.*]

RICHARD

Do you mind if I smoke?

JACKIE

Not a bit.

RICHARD

Will you?

JACKIE

No, thank you.

RICHARD [*sitting down*]

I got this case in Japan. It's pretty, isn't it?

JACKIE

Awfully pretty.

[*They lapse into hopeless silence. Enter SOREL, down stairs.*]

SOREL

Oh, Richard, I'm dreadfully sorry. I didn't know you were here.

RICHARD

We've been here a good while.

SOREL

How awful! Please forgive me. I was upstairs.

RICHARD

This is Miss Coryton.

SOREL

Oh!

JACKIE

How-do-you-do.

SOREL

Have you come to see father?

JACKIE

Yes.

SOREL

He's in his study—you'd better go up.

JACKIE

I don't know the way.

SOREL [*irritably*]

Oh, well—I'll take you. Come on. Wait a minute, Richard. [*She takes her to the top of the stairs.*] It's along that passage, and the third door on the right.

JACKIE

Oh, thank you. [*She goes out despondently.*]SOREL [*coming down again*]

The poor girl looks half-witted.

RICHARD

She's shy, I think.

SOREL

I hope father will find her a comfort.

RICHARD

Tell me one thing, Sorel, did your father and mother know I was coming?

SOREL

Oh yes; they were awfully pleased.

RICHARD

A rather nice-looking woman came down, in a big hat, and went into the garden with a young man, without saying a word.

SOREL

That was mother, I expect. We're an independent family—we entertain our friends sort of separately.

RICHARD

Oh, I see.

SOREL

It was sweet of you to come.

RICHARD

I wanted to come—I've thought about you a lot.

SOREL

Have you, really? That's thrilling.

RICHARD

I mean it. You're so alive and vital and different from other people.

SOREL

I'm so frightened that you'll be bored here.

RICHARD

Why should I be?

SOREL

Oh, I don't know. But you won't be, will you?—or if you are, tell me at once, and we'll do something quite different.

RICHARD

You're rather a dear, you know.

SOREL

I'm not—I'm devastating, entirely lacking in restraint. So's Simon. It's father's and mother's

fault, really; you see, they're so vague—they spent their lives cultivating their arts and not voting any time to ordinary conventions and manners and things. I'm the only one who sees that, I'm trying to be better. I'd love to be beautiful and carry off difficult situations with a lift of the eyebrows——

RICHARD

I'm sure you could carry off anything.

SOREL

There you are, you see, saying the right thing. You always say the right thing, and no one knows a bit what you're really thinking. That's what I adore.

RICHARD

I'm afraid to say anything now, in case you think I'm only being correct.

SOREL

But you are correct. I wish you'd teach Simon to be correct too.

RICHARD

It would be uphill work, I'm afraid.

SOREL

Why, don't you like him?

RICHARD

I've only met him for a moment.

SOREL

Would you like to see the garden?

RICHARD

Very much indeed.

SOREL

As a matter of fact, we'd better wait until after
Shall I sing you something?

RICHARD

Please—I should love it.

SOREL

I don't want to really a bit—only I'm trying to
entertain you. It's as easy as pie to talk in some
else's house, like at the dance the other night,
here on my own ground I'm finding it difficult.

RICHARD [*puzzled*]

I'm sorry.

SOREL

Oh, it isn't your fault; honestly, it isn't—you're awfully kind and responsive. What shall we do?

RICHARD

I'm quite happy talking—to you.

SOREL

Can you play Mah Jong?

RICHARD

No, I'm afraid I can't.

SOREL

I'm so glad—I *do* hate it so. [CLARA *enters, with preparations for tea.* SOREL *sighs with relief.*]
Here's tea.

CLARA

Where's your mother, dear?

SOREL

Out in the garden, I think.

CLARA

It's starting to rain.

SOREL

Oh, everyone will come dashing in, then. How awful!

RICHARD

Won't the luggage get rather wet, out there?

SOREL

What luggage?

CLARA

I'll bring it in when I've made the tea.

RICHARD [*rising*]

Oh, don't trouble; I'll do it now.

SOREL

We ought to have got William up from the village.

CLARA

It's Saturday.

SOREL

I know it is.

CLARA

He's playing cricket.

[RICHARD opens the front door and proceeds to bring the luggage in. SOREL rushes to help him.]

SOREL

Do sit down and smoke. I can easily manage it.

RICHARD

Certainly not.

SOREL

How typical of Myra to have so many bags. . . Ooh! [She staggers with a suitcase. RICHARD goes to her assistance, and they both drop it.] The end now!—we've probably broken something.

RICHARD

This is the last one. . . .

[He brings in a dressing case, and wipes his hands on his handkerchief.]

SOREL

Do you know where to wash if you want to?

RICHARD

No—but I'm all right.

Enter CLARA, with tea and hot-water jug.

SIMON and MYRA come in from the garden.]

MYRA

Hullo, Sorel, how are you?

SOREL

I'm splendid. Do you know Mr. Greatham?

MYRA

Oh yes; we've met several times.

SIMON

Come and sit down, MYRA.

DAVID and JACKIE come downstairs.]

DAVID

Is tea ready?

SOREL

Yes; just.

DAVID

Simon, come and be nice to Miss Coryton.

SIMON

We've met already.

DAVID

That's no reason for you not to be nice to her.

MYRA [*firmly*]

How-do-you-do.

DAVID

How-do-you-do. Are you staying here?

MYRA

I hope so.

DAVID

You must forgive me for being rather frowsy, but I've been working hard.

SOREL

Father, this is Mr. Greatham.

DAVID

How are you? When did you arrive?

RICHARD

This afternoon.

DAVID

Good. Have some tea. [*He begins to pour it out.*]
Everyone had better put their own sugar and milk
in, or we shall get muddled. Where's your mother,
Simon?

SIMON

She was last seen in the punt.

DAVID

How extraordinary! She can't punt.

SOREL

Sandy Tyrell's with her.

DAVID

Oh, well, she'll be all right then. Who is he?

SOREL

I don't know.

DAVID

Do sit down, everybody.
[*Enter JUDITH and SANDY from the garden.*]

JUDITH

There's going to be a thunderstorm. I felt sick this morning. This is Sandy Tyrell—everybody—

RICHARD [*shaking hands*]

How-do-you-do.

SOREL

Mother, I want you to meet Mr. Greatham.

JUDITH

Oh yes. You were here before, weren't you?

SIMON

Before *what*, darling?

JUDITH

Before I went out in the punt. There was somebody else here too—a fair girl—[*She sees JACKIE.*] Oh, there you are. How-do-you-do. Sit down, Sandy, and eat anything you want. Give Sandy some bread-and-butter, Simon.
[*Everybody sits down.*]

SIMON [*ungraciously*]

Here you are.

SANDY

Thanks.

[There is a long pause; then MYRA and RICHARD speak together.]

RICHARD

How far are you from Maidenhead exactly?

MYRA

What a pity it's raining—we might have had some tennis——

[They both stop, to let the other go on.. There is another terrible silence.]

MYRA

I adore the shape of this hall—it's so——

RICHARD

The train was awfully crowded coming down——

[They both stop again, and there is another dead silence, during which the curtain slowly falls.]



HAY FEVER

ACT II

ACT II

It is after dinner on the Saturday evening. Everyone is talking and arguing. The following scene should be played with great speed.

SIMON

Who'll go out?

SOREL

I don't mind.

SIMON

No; you always guess it too quickly.

JACKIE

What do we have to do?

JUDITH

Choose an adverb, and then——

SIMON

Some one goes out, you see, and comes in, and you've chosen a word among yourselves, and she or

he or whoever it is asks you some sort of question and you have to——

SOREL

Not an ordinary question, Simon; they have to ask them to do something in the manner of the word, and then——

SIMON

Then, you see, you act whatever it is——

SOREL

The answer to the question, you see?

RICHARD [*apprehensively*]

What sort of thing is one expected to do?

JUDITH

Quite usual things, like reciting "If," or playing the piano——

RICHARD

I can't play the piano.

SIMON

Never mind; you can fake it, as long as it conveys an idea of the word.

JACKIE

The word we've all thought of?

SOREL [*impatient*]

Yes, the word we've chosen when whoever it is is out of the room.

JACKIE

I'm afraid I don't quite understand yet.

SIMON

Never mind; I'll explain. You see, some one goes out. . . .

SOREL

I'll go out the first time, just to show her.

JUDITH

It's quite simple—all you have to do is just act in the manner of the word.

SOREL

Look here, everybody, I'm going out.

SIMON

All right; go on.

MYRA

The History game's awfully good—when two people go out, and come back as Queen Elizabeth and Crippen or somebody.

SANDY [*despondently*]

I'm no earthly good at this sort of thing.

SOREL

I'll show you, Sandy. You see. . . .

JUDITH

There's always "How, When and Where?" We haven't played that for ages.

SIMON

We will afterwards. We'll do this one first.—Go on, Sorel.

SOREL

Don't be too long.
[*She goes out.*]

SIMON

Now then.

JUDITH

"Bitterly."

SIMON

No, we did that last week ; she'll know.

DAVID

"Intensely."

JUDITH

Too difficult.

RICHARD

There was an amusing game I played once at the Harringtons' house. Everyone was blindfolded except——

SIMON

This room's not big enough for that. What about "winsomely"?

JACKIE

I wish I knew what we had to do.

JUDITH

You'll see when we start playing.

MYRA

If we start playing.

SIMON

Mother's brilliant at this. Do you remember when we played it at the Mackenzies'?

JUDITH

Yes, and Blanche was so cross when I kissed Freddie's ear in the manner of the word.

RICHARD

What was the word?

JUDITH

I can't remember.

MYRA

Perhaps it's as well.

DAVID

What about "drearily"?

JUDITH

Not definite enough.

SIMON

"Winsomely" is the best.

JUDITH

She's sure to guess it straight off.

SIMON [*confidentially to JACKIE*]

These games are much too brainy for me.

DAVID

Young Norman Robertson used to be marvelous—do you remember?

SIMON

Yes, wonderful sense of humor.

MYRA

He's lost it all since his marriage.

JUDITH

I didn't know you knew him.

MYRA

Well, considering he married my cousin——

RICHARD

We don't seem to be getting on with the game.

JUDITH

We haven't thought of a word yet.

MYRA

"Brightly."

SIMON

Too obvious.

MYRA

Very well—don't snap at me!

JUDITH

"Saucily." I've got a lovely idea for "saucily."

MYRA [*at SIMON*]

I should think "rudely" would be the easiest.

SIMON

Don't be sour, Myra.

JUDITH

The great thing is to get an obscure word.

SIMON

What a pity Irene isn't here—she knows masses of obscure words.

MYRA

She's probably picked them up from her obscure friends.

SIMON

It's no use being catty about Irene; she's a perfect darling.

MYRA

I wasn't being catty at all.

SIMON

Yes, you were.

SOREL [*off*]

Hurry up!

JUDITH

Quickly, now! We must think——

JACKIE [*helpfully*]

"Appendicitis."

JUDITH [*witheringly*]

That's not an adverb.

SIMON

You're thinking of charades.

SANDY

Charades are damned good fun.

SIMON

Yes, but we don't happen to be doing them at the moment.

SANDY

Sorry.

JUDITH

"Saucily."

SIMON

No, "winsomely's" better.

JUDITH

All right. Call her in.

SIMON [*calling*]

Sorel—come on; we're ready.
[*Re-enter SOREL.*]

SANDY [*hoarsely to SIMON*]

Which is it?—"saucily" or "winsomely"?

SIMON [*whispering*]

"Winsomely."

SOREL [*to JUDITH*]

Go and take a flower out of that vase and give it to Richard.

JUDITH

Very well.

[*She trips lightly over to the vase, gurgling with coy laughter, selects a flower, then goes over to RICHARD; pursing her lips into a mock smile, she gives him the flower, with a little girlish gasp at her own daring, and wags her finger archly at him.*]

SIMON

Marvelous, mother!

SOREL [*laughing*]

Oh, lovely! . . . Now, Myra, get up and say good-by to everyone in the manner of the word.

MYRA [*rises and starts with DAVID*]

Good-by. It really has been most delightful——

JUDITH

No, no, no!

MYRA

Why—what do you mean?

JUDITH

You haven't got the right intonation a bit.

SIMON

Oh, mother darling, do shut up!

MYRA [*acidly*]

Remember what an advantage you have over we poor amateurs, Judith, having been a professional for so long.

JUDITH

I don't like "so long" very much.

SOREL

Do you think we might go on now?

MYRA

Go to the next one; I'm not going to do any more.

SIMON

Oh, please do. You were simply splendid.

SOREL

It doesn't matter. [*To RICHARD.*] Light a cigarette in the manner of the word.

RICHARD

I've forgotten what it is.

JUDITH [*grimacing at him violently*]

You remember . . .

RICHARD

Oh yes.

[*He proceeds to light a cigarette with great abandon, winking his eye and chuckling SOREL under the chin.*]

JUDITH

Oh, no, no, no!

MYRA

I can't think *what* that's meant to be.

RICHARD [*offended*]

I was doing my best.

JUDITH

It's so *frightfully* easy, and nobody can do it right.

SIMON

I believe you've muddled it up.

RICHARD

You'd better go on to the next one.

JUDITH

Which word were you doing? Whisper——

RICHARD [*whispering*]

"Saucily."

JUDITH

I knew it!—He was doing the wrong word. [*She whispers to him.*]

RICHARD

Oh, I see. I'm so sorry.

JUDITH

Give him another chance.

SIMON

No, it's Jackie's turn now; it will come round to him again, I'm afraid.

SOREL [*to JACKIE*]

Do a dance in the manner of the word.

JACKIE [*giggling*]

I can't.

JUDITH

Nonsense! Of course you can.

JACKIE

I can't—honestly—I . . .

SIMON [*pulling her to her feet*]

Go on; have a shot at it.

JACKIE

No, I'd much rather not. Count me out.

JUDITH

Really, the ridiculous fuss everyone makes——

JACKIE

I'm awfully stupid at anything like this.

SOREL

It's only a game, after all.

DAVID

Come along—try.

JACKIE [*dragging back*]

I couldn't—please don't ask me to. I simply couldn't.

SIMON

Leave her alone if she doesn't want to.

SOREL [*irritably*]

What's the use of playing at all, if people won't do it properly?

JUDITH

It's *so* simple.

SANDY

It's awfully difficult if you haven't done it before.

SIMON

Go on to the next one.

SOREL [*firmly*]

Unless everyone's in it we won't play at all.

SIMON

Now don't lose your temper.

SOREL

Lose my temper! I like that! No one's given me the slightest indication of what the word is—you all argue and squabble——

DAVID

Talk, talk, talk! Everybody talks too much.

JUDITH

It's so surprising to me when people won't play up. After all——

JACKIE [*with spirit*]

It's a hateful game, anyhow, and I don't want to play it again ever.

SOREL

You haven't played it at all yet.

SIMON

Don't be rude, Sorel.

SOREL

Really, Simon, the way you go on is infuriating!

SIMON

It's always the way; whenever Sorel goes out she gets quarrelsome.

SOREL

Quarrelsome!

SIMON

Don't worry, Jackie; you needn't do anything you don't want to.

JUDITH

I think, for the future, we'd better confine our efforts to social conversation and not attempt anything in the least intelligent.

SIMON

How can you be so unkind, mother?

JUDITH [*sharply*]

Don't speak to me like that.

JACKIE

It's all my fault—I know I'm awfully silly, but it embarrasses me so terribly doing anything in front of people.

SOREL [*with acidity*]

I should think the word was “winsomely.”

SIMON

You must have been listening outside the door, then.

SOREL

Not at all—Miss Coryton gave it away.

SIMON

Why “Miss Coryton” all of a sudden? You've been calling her Jackie all the evening. You're far too grand, Sorel.

SOREL

And you're absolutely maddening—I'll never play another game with you as long as I live.

SIMON

That won't break my heart.

JUDITH

Stop, stop, stop!

SIMON [*grabbing JACKIE's hand*]

Come out in the garden. I'm sick of this.

SOREL

Don't let him take you on the river; he isn't very good at it.

SIMON [*over his shoulder*]

Ha, ha!—very funny.
[*He drags JACKIE off.*]

JUDITH

Sorel, you're behaving disgracefully.

SOREL

Simon ought to go into the army, or something.

DAVID

You both ought to be in reformatories.

SOREL

This always happens whenever we play a game. We're a beastly family, and I hate us.

JUDITH

Speak for yourself, dear.

SOREL

I can't, without speaking for everyone else too—we're all exactly the same, and I'm ashamed of us.—Come into the library, Sandy.
[*She drags SANDY off.*]

MYRA

Charming! It's all perfectly charming.

DAVID

I think it would be better, Judith, if you exercised a little more influence over the children.

JUDITH

That's right—blame it all on me.

DAVID

After all, dear, you started it, by snapping everybody up.

JUDITH

You ought never to have married me, David; it was a great mistake.

DAVID

The atmosphere of this house is becoming more unbearable every day, and all because Simon and Sorel are allowed to do exactly what they like.

JUDITH

You sit upstairs all day, writing your novels.

DAVID

Novels which earn us our daily bread.

JUDITH

"Daily bread" nonsense! We've got enough money to keep us in comfort until we die.

DAVID

That will be very soon, if we can't get a little peace. [*To MYRA.*] Come out into the garden——

JUDITH

I sincerely hope the night air will cool you.

DAVID

I don't know what's happened to you lately, Judith.

JUDITH

Nothing's happened to me—nothing ever does. You're far too smug to allow it.

DAVID

Smug! Thank you.

JUDITH

Yes, smug, smug, smug! And pompous!

DAVID

I hope you haven't been drinking, dear.

JUDITH

Drinking! Huh! that's very amusing!

DAVID

I think it's rather tragic, at your time of life.
He goes out with MYRA.]

JUDITH

David's been a good husband to me, but he's wearing a bit thin now.

RICHARD

Would you like me to go? To leave you alone for a little?

JUDITH

Why? Are you afraid I shall become violent?

RICHARD [*smiling*]

No; I merely thought perhaps I was in the way.

JUDITH

I hope you're not embarrassed—I couldn't bear you to be embarrassed.

RICHARD

Not in the least.

JUDITH

Marriage is a hideous affair altogether, don't you think?

RICHARD

I'm really hardly qualified to judge, you see.

JUDITH

Do stop being non-committal, just for once; it's doubly annoying in the face of us all having lost control so lamentably.

RICHARD

I'm sorry.

JUDITH

There's nothing to be sorry for, really, because, after all, it's your particular "thing," isn't it?—observing everything and not giving yourself away an inch.

RICHARD

I suppose it is.

JUDITH

You'll get used to us in time, you know, and then you'll feel cozier. Why don't you sit down?
[*She sits on sofa.*]

RICHARD

I'm enjoying myself very much.

JUDITH

It's very sweet of you to say so, but I don't see how you can be.

RICHARD [*laughing suddenly*]

But I am!

JUDITH

There now! that was quite a genuine laugh. We're getting on. Are you in love with Sorel?

RICHARD [*surprised and embarrassed*]

In love with Sorel?

JUDITH [*repentantly*]

Now I've killed it—I've murdered the little tender feeling of comfort that was stealing over you by sheer tactlessness! Will you teach me to be tactful?

RICHARD

Did you really think I was in love with Sorel?

JUDITH

It's so difficult to tell, isn't it?—I mean, you might not know yourself. She's very attractive.

RICHARD

Yes, she is—very.

JUDITH

Have you heard her sing?

RICHARD

No, not yet.

JUDITH

She sings beautifully. Are you susceptible to music?

RICHARD

I'm afraid I don't know very much about it.

JUDITH

You probably are, then. I'll sing you something.

RICHARD

Please do.

JUDITH [*rising*]

It's awfully sad for a woman of my temperament to have a grown-up daughter, you know. I have to put my pride in my pocket and develop in her all the charming little feminine tricks which will eventually cut me out altogether.

RICHARD

That wouldn't be possible.

JUDITH

I do hope you meant that, because it was a sweet remark.

[*She is at the piano, turning over music.*]

RICHARD [*following her*]

Of course I meant it.

JUDITH

Will you lean on the piano in an attentive attitude? It's such a help.

RICHARD

You're an extraordinary person.

JUDITH [*beginning to play*]

In what way extraordinary?

RICHARD

When I first met Sorel, I guessed what you'd be like.

JUDITH

Did you, now? And am I?

RICHARD [*smiling*]

Exactly.

JUDITH

Oh, well. . . .

[*She plays and sings a little French song. There is a slight pause when it is finished.*]

RICHARD [*with feeling*]

Thank you.

JUDITH [*rising from the piano*]

It's pretty, isn't it?

RICHARD

Perfectly enchanting.

JUDITH

Shall we sit down again?

[*She reseats herself on sofa.*]

RICHARD

Won't you sing any more?

JUDITH

No, no more—I want you to talk to me and tell me all about yourself, and the things you've done.

RICHARD

I've done nothing.

JUDITH

What a shame! Why not?

RICHARD

I never realize how dead I am until I meet people like you. It's depressing, you know.

JUDITH

What nonsense! You're not a bit dead.

RICHARD

Do you always live here?

JUDITH

I'm going to, from now onwards. I intend to sink into a very beautiful old age. When the children marry, I shall wear a cap.

RICHARD [*smiling*]

How absurd!

JUDITH

I don't mean a funny cap.

RICHARD

You're far too full of vitality to sink into anything.

JUDITH

It's entirely spurious vitality. If you troubled to look below the surface, you'd find a very wistful and weary spirit. I've been battling with life for a long time.

RICHARD

Surely such successful battles as yours have been are not wearying?

JUDITH

Yes, they are—frightfully. I've reached an age now when I just want to sit back and let things go on around me—and they do.

RICHARD

I should like to know exactly what you're thinking about—really.

JUDITH

I was thinking of calling you Richard. It's such a nice uncompromising name.

RICHARD

I should be very flattered if you would.

JUDITH

I won't suggest you calling me Judith until you feel really comfortable about me.

RICHARD

But I do—Judith.

JUDITH

I'm awfully glad. Will you give me a cigarette?

RICHARD [*producing case*]

Certainly.

JUDITH [*taking one*]

That's a divine case.

RICHARD

It was given to me in Japan three years ago. All those little designs mean things.

JUDITH [*bending over it*]

What sort of things?

RICHARD

Charms for happiness, and luck, and—love.

JUDITH

Which is the charm for love?

RICHARD

That one.

JUDITH

What a dear!

RICHARD [*kissing her gently*]

Judith!

JUDITH [*jumping*]

Richard!

RICHARD

I'm afraid I couldn't help it.

JUDITH [*dramatically*]

What are we to do? What are we to do?

RICHARD

I don't know.

JUDITH

David must be told—everything!

RICHARD [*alarmed*]

Everything?

JUDITH [*enjoying herself*]

Yes, yes. There come moments in life when it is necessary to be honest—absolutely honest. I've trained myself always to shun the underhand methods other women so often employ—the truth must be faced fair and square——

RICHARD [*extremely alarmed*]

The truth? I don't quite understand.

JUDITH

Dear Richard, you want to spare me, I know—you're so chivalrous; but it's no use. After all, as I said before, David has been a good husband to me, according to his lights. This may, of course, break him up rather, but it can't be helped; he must be told. I wonder—oh, I wonder how he'll take it. They say suffering's good for writers, it strengthens their psychology. Oh, my poor, poor David!—Never mind. You'd better go out into the garden and wait——

RICHARD [*flustered*]

Wait? What for?

JUDITH

For me, Richard, for me. I will come to you later. Wait in the summer-house. I had begun to think that Romance was dead, that I should never know it again. Before, of course, I had my work and my life in the theater, but now, nothing—nothing! Everything is empty and hollow, like a broken shell.

RICHARD

Look here, Judith, I apologize for what I did just now. I——

JUDITH [*ignoring all interruption*]

But now you have come, and it's all changed—it's magic. I'm under a spell that I never thought I could recapture again. Go along——

[She pushes him towards the garden.]

RICHARD [*protesting*]

But, Judith——

JUDITH [*pushing him firmly*]

Don't—don't make it any harder for me. I am quite resolved—it is my self-appointed Calvary, and it's the only possible way!

[*She pushes him into the garden and waves to him bravely with her handkerchief; then she comes back into the room and powders her nose before the glass and pats her hair into place. Then, assuming an expression of restrained tragedy, she opens the library door, from which she recoils genuinely shocked. After a moment or two SOREL and SANDY come out rather sheepishly.*]

SOREL

Look here, mother, I——

JUDITH

Sorel, what am I to say to you?

SOREL

I don't know, mother.

JUDITH

Neither do I.

SANDY

It was my fault, Mrs. Bliss—Judith——

JUDITH

What a fool I've been! What a blind fool!

SOREL

Mother, are you *really* upset?

JUDITH [*with feeling*]

I'm stunned.

SOREL

But, darling——

JUDITH [*gently*]

Don't speak for a moment, Sorel; we must all be very quiet, and think——

SOREL

It was nothing, really. For Heaven's sake——

JUDITH

Nothing! I open the library door casually, and what do I see? I ask you, what do I see?

SANDY

I'm most awfully sorry. . . .

JUDITH

Ssshh! It has gone beyond superficial apologies.

SOREL

Mother, be natural for a minute.

JUDITH

I don't know what you mean, Sorel. I'm trying to realize a very bitter truth as calmly as I can.

SOREL

There's nothing so very bitter about it.

JUDITH

My poor child!

SOREL [*suddenly*]

Very well, then! I love Sandy, and he loves me

JUDITH

That would be the only possible excuse for your behavior.

SOREL

Why shouldn't we love each other if we want to?

JUDITH

Sandy was in love with me this afternoon.

SOREL

Not real love—you know it wasn't.

JUDITH [*bitterly*]

I know now.

SANDY

I say—look here—I'm most awfully sorry.

JUDITH

There's nothing to be sorry for, really; it's my fault for having been so—so ridiculous.

SOREL

Mother!

JUDITH [*sadly*]

Yes, ridiculous. I'm getting old, old, and the longer I face it the better.

SOREL [*hopelessly*]

But, darling . . .

JUDITH [*splendidly*]

Youth will be served. You're so pretty, Sorel, far prettier than I ever was—I'm very glad you're pretty.

SANDY

I feel a fearful cad.

JUDITH

Why should you? You've answered the only c
that really counts—the call of Love, and Roman
and Spring. I forgive you, Sandy, complete
There.

SOREL

Well, that's all right, then.

JUDITH

I resent your tone, Sorel; you seem to be taking
things too much for granted. Perhaps you don't
realize that I am making a great sacrifice!

SOREL

Sorry, darling.

JUDITH

It's far from easy, at my time of life, to——

SOREL [*playing up*]

Mother—mother, say you understand and for
give!

JUDITH

Understand! You forget, dear, I am a woman.

SOREL

I know you are, mother. That's what makes it all so poignant.

JUDITH [*magnanimously, to SANDY*]

If you want Sorel, truly, I give her to you—unconditionally.

SANDY [*dazed*]

Thanks—awfully, Mrs. Bliss.

JUDITH

You can still call me Judith, can't you?—it's not much to ask.

SANDY

Judith.

JUDITH [*bravely*]

There, now. Away with melancholy. This is all tremendously exciting, and we must all be very happy.

SOREL

Don't tell father—yet.

JUDITH

We won't tell anybody; it shall be our little secret.

SOREL

You are splendid, mother.

JUDITH

Nonsense. I just believe in being honest with myself—it's awfully good for one, you know, so cleansing. I'm going upstairs now to have a little aspirin—— [*She goes upstairs, and turns.*] Ah Youth, Youth, what a strange, mad muddle you make of things!

[*She goes off. SOREL heaves a slight sigh, and takes a cigarette.*]

SOREL

Well, that's that.

SANDY

Yes.

SOREL

It's all right. Don't look so gloomy—I know you don't love me really.

SANDY [*startled*]

I say, Sorel——

SOREL

Don't protest; you know you don't—any more than I love you.

SANDY

But you told Judith——

SOREL [*nonchalantly*]

I was only playing up—one always plays up to mother in this house; it's a sort of unwritten law.

SANDY

Didn't she mean all she said?

SOREL

No, not really; we none of us ever mean anything.

SANDY

She seemed awfully upset.

SOREL

It must have been a slight shock for her to discover us clasped tightly in each other's arms.

SANDY

I believe I do love you, Sorel.

SOREL

A month ago I should have let you go on believing that, but now I can't—I'm bent on improving myself.

SANDY

I don't understand.

SOREL

Never mind—it doesn't matter. You just fell a victim to the atmosphere, that's all. There we were alone in the library, with the windows wide open, and probably a nightingale somewhere about——

SANDY

I only heard a cuckoo.

SOREL

Even a cuckoo has charm, in moderation. You kissed me because you were awfully nice and I was awfully nice and we both liked kissing very much. It was inevitable. Then mother found us and got dramatic—her sense of the theater is always fatal.

She knows we shan't marry, the same as you and I do. You're under absolutely no obligation to me at all.

SANDY

I wish I understood you a bit better.

SOREL

Never mind about understanding me. Let's go back into the library.

SANDY

All right.

[They go off. After a moment's pause, DAVID and MYRA enter from the garden.]

DAVID

. . . And, you see, he comes in and finds her there waiting for him.

MYRA

She hadn't been away at all?

DAVID

No; and that's psychologically right, I'm sure. No woman, under those circumstances, *would*.

MYRA

It's brilliant of you to see that. I do think the whole thing sounds most excellent.

DAVID

I got badly stuck in the middle of the book, when the boy comes down from Oxford—but it worked out all right eventually.

MYRA [*sitting on sofa*]

When shall I be able to read it?

DAVID

I'll send you the proofs—you can help me correct them.

MYRA

How divine! I shall feel most important.

DAVID

Would you like a cigarette, or anything?

MYRA

No, thank you.

DAVID

I think I'll have a drink.

MYRA

Very well; give me some plain soda-water, then.

DAVID [*going to side table*]

There isn't any ice—d'you mind?

MYRA

Not a bit.

DAVID [*bringing her drink*]

Here you are.

MYRA

Thank you. [*She sips it.*] I wonder where everybody is.

DAVID

Not here, thank God.

MYRA

It must be dreadfully worrying for you, having a houseful of people.

DAVID [*having poured himself out a whisky-and-soda, sits down by her side*]

It depends on the people.

MYRA

I have a slight confession to make.

DAVID

Confession?

MYRA

Yes. Do you know why I came down here?

DAVID

Not in the least. I suppose one of us asked you, didn't they?

MYRA

Oh yes, they asked me, but——

DAVID

Well?

MYRA

I was invited once before——last September.

DAVID

I was in America then.

MYRA

Exactly.

DAVID

How do you mean "exactly"?

MYRA

I didn't come. I'm a very determined woman, you know, and I made up my mind to meet you ages ago.

DAVID

That was charming of you. I'm not much to meet really.

MYRA

You see, I'd read *Broken Reeds*.

DAVID

Did you like it?

MYRA

Like it! I think it's one of the finest novels I've ever read.

DAVID

There now!

MYRA

How do you manage to know so much about women?

DAVID

I'm afraid my knowledge of them is sadly superficial.

MYRA

Oh no; you can't call Evelyn's character superficial—it's amazing.

DAVID

Why are you being so nice to me? Have you got a plan about something?

MYRA [*laughing*]

How suspicious you are!

DAVID

I can't help it—you're very attractive, and I'm always suspicious of attractive people, on principle.

MYRA

Not a very good principle.

DAVID

I'll tell you something—strictly between ourselves.

MYRA

Do.

DAVID

You're wrong about me.

MYRA

Wrong? In what way?

DAVID

I write very bad novels.

MYRA

Don't be so ridiculous.

DAVID

And you *know* I do, because you're an intelligent
rson.

MYRA

I don't know anything of the sort.

DAVID

Tell me why you're being so nice to me?

MYRA

Because I want to be.

DAVID

Why?

MYRA

You're a very clever and amusing man.

DAVID

Splendid.

MYRA

And I think I've rather lost my heart to you.

DAVID

Shall we elope?

MYRA

David!

DAVID

There now, you've called me David!

MYRA

Do you mind?

DAVID

Not at all.

MYRA

I'm not sure that you're being very kind.

DAVID

What makes you think that?

MYRA

You're being rather the cynical author laughing up his sleeve at a gushing admirer.

DAVID

I think you're a very interesting woman, and extremely nice-looking.

MYRA

Do you?

DAVID

Yes. Would you like me to make love to you?

MYRA [*rising*]

Really—I wish you wouldn't say things like that.

DAVID

I've knocked you off your plate—I'll look away for a minute while you climb on to it again.

[*He does so.*]

MYRA [*laughing affectedly*]

This is wonderful!
[*She sits down again.*]

DAVID [*turning*]

That's right. Now then——

MYRA

Now then, what?

DAVID

You're adorable—you're magnificent—you're
tawny——

MYRA

I'm not tawny.

DAVID

Don't argue.

MYRA

This is sheer affectation.

DAVID

Affectation's very nice.

MYRA

No, it isn't—it's odious.

DAVID

You mustn't get cross.

MYRA

I'm not in the least cross.

DAVID

Yes, you are—but you're very alluring.

MYRA [*perking up*]

Alluring?

DAVID

Terribly.

MYRA

I can hear your brain clicking—it's very funny.

DAVID

That was rather rude.

MYRA

You've been consistently rude to me for hours.

DAVID

Never mind.

MYRA

Why have you?

DAVID

I'm always rude to people I like.

MYRA

Do you like me?

DAVID

Enormously.

MYRA

How sweet of you!

DAVID

But I don't like your methods.

MYRA

Methods? What methods?

DAVID

You're far too pleasant to occupy yourself with the commonplace.

MYRA

And you spoil yourself by trying to be clever.

DAVID

Thank you.

MYRA

Anyhow, I don't know what you mean by complacency.

DAVID

You mean you want me to explain?

MYRA

Not at all.

DAVID

Very well; I will.

MYRA

I shan't listen.

[She stops up her ears.]

DAVID

You'll pretend not to, but you'll hear every word
ally.

MYRA [*sarcastically*]

You're so inscrutable and quizzical—just what a feminine psychologist should be.

DAVID

Yes, aren't I?

MYRA

You frighten me dreadfully.

DAVID

Darling!

MYRA

Don't call me darling.

DAVID

That's unreasonable. You've been trying to make me—
all the evening.

MYRA

Your conceit is outrageous!

DAVID

It's not conceit at all. You've been firmly buttering me up because you want a nice little intrigue.

MYRA [*rising*]

How dare you!

DAVID [*pulling her down again*]

It's true, it's true. If it weren't, you wouldn't be so angry.

MYRA

I think you're insufferable!

DAVID [*taking her hand*]

Myra—dear Myra——

MYRA [*snatching it away*]

Don't touch me.

DAVID

Let's have that nice little intrigue. The only reason I've been so annoying is that I love to see things as they are first, and then pretend they're what they're not.

MYRA

Words! Masses and masses of words!

DAVID

They're great fun to play with.

MYRA

I'm glad you think so. Personally, they bore me stiff.

DAVID [*catching her hand again*]

Myra—don't be statuesque.

MYRA

Let go my hand!

DAVID

You're charming.

[*He gets up and stands close to her.*]

MYRA [*furiously*]

Let go my hand.

DAVID

I won't.

MYRA

You will!

[*She slaps his face hard, and he seizes her in his arms and kisses her.*]

DAVID [*between kisses*]

You're—perfectly—sweet.

MYRA [*giving in*]

David!

DAVID

You must say it's an entrancing amusement.
He kisses her again. JUDITH appears at the top of the stairs and sees them. They break away.]

JUDITH [*coming down*]

Forgive me for interrupting.

DAVID

Are there any chocolates in the house?

JUDITH

No, David.

DAVID

I should like a chocolate more than anything in the world, at the moment.

JUDITH

This is a very unpleasant situation, David.

DAVID [*agreeably*]

Horrible.

JUDITH

We'd better talk it all over.

MYRA [*making a movement*]

I shall do nothing of the sort.

JUDITH

Please—please don't be difficult.

DAVID

I apologize, Judith.

JUDITH

Don't apologize—I quite understand.

MYRA

Please let go of my hand, David; I should like to go to bed.

JUDITH

I should stay if I were you—it would be more dignified.

DAVID

There isn't any real necessity for a scene.

JUDITH

I don't want a scene. I just want to straighten things out.

DAVID

Very well—go ahead.

JUDITH

June has always been an unlucky month for me.

MYRA

Look here, Judith, I'd like to explain one thing—

JUDITH [*austerely*]

I don't wish to hear any explanations or excuses—they're so cheapening. This was bound to happen sooner or later—it always does, to everybody. The only thing is to keep calm.

DAVID

I am—perfectly.

JUDITH [*sharply*]

There is such a thing as being too calm.

DAVID

Sorry, dear.

JUDITH

Life has dealt me another blow, but I don't mind.

DAVID

What did you say?

JUDITH [*crossly*]

I said Life had dealt me another blow, but I didn't mind.

DAVID

Rubbish.

JUDITH [*gently*]

You're probably irritable, dear, because you're in the wrong. It's quite usual.

DAVID

Now, Judith——

JUDITH

Ssshhh! Let me speak—it is my right.

MYRA

I don't see why.

JUDITH [*surprised*]

I am the injured party, am I not?

MYRA

Injured?

JUDITH [*firmly*]

Yes, extremely injured.

DAVID [*contemptuously*]

Injured!

JUDITH

Your attitude, David, is nothing short of deplorable.

DAVID

It's all nonsense—sheer, unbridled nonsense.

JUDITH

No, David, you can't evade the real issues as calmly as that. I've known for a long time—I've realized subconsciously for years that you've stopped caring for me in "that way."

DAVID [*irritably*]

What do you mean—"that way"?

JUDITH [*with a wave of the hand*]

Just that way. . . . It's rather tragic, but quite inevitable. I'm growing old now—men don't grow old like women, as you'll find to your cost, Myra, in a year or two. David has retained his youth astonishingly, perhaps because he has had fewer responsibilities and cares than I——

MYRA

This is all ridiculous hysteria.

DAVID [*looking at her and not liking her very much.*]

No, Myra—Judith is right. What are we to do?

MYRA [*furious*]

Do? Nothing!

JUDITH [*ignoring her*]

Do you love her truly, David?

DAVID

Madly.

MYRA [*astounded*]

David!

DAVID [*intensely*]

You thought just now that I was joking. Couldn't you see that all my flippancy was only a mask, hiding my real emotions—crushing them down desperately——?

MYRA [*scared*]

But, David, I——

JUDITH

I knew it! The time has come for the dividing of the ways.

MYRA

What on earth do you mean?

JUDITH

I mean that I am not the sort of woman to hold a man against his will.

MYRA

You're both making a mountain out of a mole-hill. David doesn't love me madly, and I don't love him. It's——

JUDITH

Ssshhh!—you *do* love him. I can see it in your eyes—in your every gesture. David, I give you to

her—freely and without rancor. We must all be good friends, always.

DAVID

Judith, do you mean this?

JUDITH [*with a melting look*]

You know I do.

DAVID

How can we ever repay you?

JUDITH

Just by being happy. I may leave this house later on—I have a feeling that its associations may become painful, specially in the autumn——

MYRA

Look here, Judith——

JUDITH [*shouting her down*]

October is such a mournful month in England. I think I shall probably go abroad—perhaps a *pension* somewhere in Italy, with cypresses in the garden. I've always loved cypresses.

DAVID

What about the children?

JUDITH

We must share them, dear.

DAVID

I'll pay you exactly half the royalties I receive from everything, Judith.

JUDITH [*bowing her head*]

That's very generous of you.

DAVID

You have behaved magnificently. This is a crisis in our lives, and thanks to you——

MYRA [*almost shrieking*]

Judith—I *will* speak—I——

DAVID

Ssshhh, Myra darling—we owe it to Judith to keep control of our emotions—a scene would be agonizing for her now. She has been brave and absolutely splendid throughout. Let's not make things harder for her than we can help. Come, we'll go out into the garden.

MYRA

I will *not* go out into the garden.

JUDITH [*twisting her handkerchief*]

Please go—I don't think I can bear any more just now.

DAVID

So this is the end, Judith?

JUDITH

Yes, my dear,—the end.

[*They shake hands sadly. SIMON enters violently from the garden.*]

SIMON

Mother—mother, I've got something important to tell you.

JUDITH [*smiling bravely*]

Very well, dear.

SIMON

Where's Sorel.

JUDITH

In the library, I'm afraid.

SIMON [*opening library door*]

Sorel, come out—I've got something vital to tell you.

DAVID [*fatherly*]

You seem excited, my boy. What has happened?

SOREL [*entering with SANDY*]

What's the matter?

SIMON

I wish you wouldn't all look so depressed—it's good news!

DAVID

Good news! I thought perhaps Jackie had been drowned——

SIMON

No, Jackie hasn't been drowned—she's been something else.

JUDITH

Simon, what *do* you mean?

SIMON [*calling*]

Jackie—Jackie! [*JACKIE enters coyly from the garden.*] She has become engaged—to me!

JUDITH [*in heartfelt tones*]

Simon!

SOREL

Good heavens!

JUDITH

Simon, my dear! Oh, this is too much!
[*She cries a little.*]

SIMON

What on earth are you crying about, mother?

JUDITH [*picturesquely*]

All my chicks leaving the nest. Now I shall only have my memories left. Jackie, come and kiss me. [JACKIE *goes to her.*] You must promise to make my son happy——

JACKIE [*worried*]

But, Mrs. Bliss——

JUDITH

Ssshhh! I understand. I have not been a mother for nothing.

JACKIE [*wildly*]

But it's not true—we don't——

JUDITH

You're trying to spare my feelings—I know——

MYRA [*furiously*]

Well, I'm not going to spare your feelings, or anyone else's. You're the most infuriating set of hypocrites I've ever seen. This house is a complete feather bed of false emotions—you're posing, self-centered egotists, and I'm sick to death of you.

SIMON

Myra!

MYRA

Don't speak to me. I've been working up for this, only every time I opened my mouth I've been mowed down by theatrical effects. You haven't got one sincere or genuine feeling among the lot of you—you're artificial to the point of lunacy. It's a great pity you ever left the stage, Judith—it's your rightful home. You can rant and roar there as much as ever you like——

JUDITH

Rant and roar! May God forgive you!

MYRA

And let me tell you this——

You don't seem to grasp one thing that——

SIMON [*interrupting*]

I'm not going to allow you to say another word
to mother——

[*Together.*]

SOREL

You ought to be ashamed of yourself——

MYRA

Let me speak—I will speak——

DAVID

Look here, Myra——

JUDITH

This is appalling—appalling!

SOREL

You must be stark, staring mad——

MYRA

Never again—never as long as I live——

DAVID

SIMON

Why are you behaving like this, anyhow?

[*In the middle of the pandemonium of everyone talking at once, RICHARD comes in from the garden. He looks extremely apprehensive, imagining that the noise is the outcome of JUDITH's hysterical confession of their lukewarm passion. He goes to JUDITH's side, summoning all his diplomatic forces. At his entrance everyone stops talking.*]

RICHARD [*with forced calm*]

What's happened? Is this a game?

[*JUDITH's face gives a slight twitch; then with a meaning look at SOREL and SIMON, she answers him.*]

JUDITH [*with spirit*]

Yes, and a game that must be played to the finish!

SIMON [*grasping the situation*]

Zara! What does this mean?

JUDITH [*in bell-like tones*]

So many illusions shattered—so many dreams trodden in the dust——

DAVID [*collapsing on to the sofa in hysterics*]

Love's whirlwind! Dear old Love's whirlwind!

SOREL

I don't understand. You and Victor—My God!

JUDITH

Hush! Isn't that little Pam crying——?

SIMON [*savagely*]

She'll cry more, poor mite, when she realizes her mother is a—a——

JUDITH [*shrinking*]

Don't say it! Don't say it!

SOREL

Spare her that.

JUDITH

I've given you all that makes life worth living—my youth, my womanhood, and now my child. Would you tear the very heart out of me? I tell you, it's infamous that men like you should be allowed to pollute Society. You have ruined my life. I have nothing left—nothing. God in heaven, where am I to turn for help . . .

SOREL [*through clenched teeth*]

Is this true? Answer me—is this true?

JUDITH [*wailing*]

Yes, yes!

SOREL [*springing at SIMON*]

You cur! ! !

JUDITH [*rushing between them*]

Don't strike! He is your father!

[*She totters and falls in a dead faint.*]

[MYRA, JACKIE, RICHARD, and SANDY look on,
dazed and aghast.]

CURTAIN.

HAY FEVER

ACT III

ACT III

It is Sunday morning, about ten o'clock. There are various breakfast dishes on a side table, and a big table is laid down center.

SANDY appears at the top of the stairs. On seeing no one about, he comes down quickly and furtively helps himself to eggs and bacon and coffee, and seats himself at the table. He eats very hurriedly, casting occasional glances over his shoulder. A door bangs somewhere upstairs, which terrifies him; he chokes violently. When he has recovered, he tears a bit of toast from a rack, butters it and marmalades it and crams it into his mouth. Then, hearing somebody approaching, he darts into the library.

JACKIE comes downstairs timorously; her expression is dismal, to say the least of it. She looks miserably out of the window at the pouring rain, then, assuming an air of spurious bravado, she helps herself to some breakfast and sits down and looks at it. After one or two attempts to eat it, she bursts into tears.

SANDY opens the library door a crack and peeps

out. JACKIE, seeing the door move, screams. SANDY re-enters.

JACKIE

Oh, it's only you—you frightened me!

SANDY

What's the matter?

JACKIE [*sniffing*]

Nothing.

SANDY

I say, don't cry.

JACKIE

I'm not crying.

SANDY

You were—I heard you.

JACKIE

It's this house. It gets on my nerves.

SANDY

I don't wonder—after last night.

JACKIE

What were you doing in the library just now?

SANDY

Hiding.

JACKIE

Hiding?

SANDY

Yes; I didn't want to run up against any of the family.

JACKIE

I wish I'd never come. I had horrible nightmares with all those fearful dragons crawling across the wall.

SANDY

Dragons?

JACKIE

Yes; I'm in a Japanese room—everything in it's Japanese, even the bed.

SANDY

How awful!

JACKIE

I believe they're all mad, you know.

SANDY

The Blisses?

JACKIE

Yes—they must be.

SANDY

I've been thinking that too.

JACKIE

Do you suppose they know they're mad?

SANDY

No; people never do.

JACKIE

It was Mr. Bliss asked me down, and he hasn't paid any attention to me at all. I went into his study soon after I arrived yesterday, and he said, "Who the hell are you?"

SANDY

Didn't he remember?

JACKIE

He did afterwards; then he brought me down to tea and left me.

SANDY

Are you really engaged to Simon?

JACKIE [*bursting into tears again*]

Oh no—I hope not!

SANDY

You were, last night.

JACKIE

So were you—to Sorel.

SANDY

Not properly. We talked it over.

JACKIE

I don't know what happened to me. I was in the garden with Simon, and he was being awfully sweet, and then he suddenly kissed me, and rushed into the house and said we were engaged—and that hateful Judith asked me to make him happy!

SANDY

That's exactly what happened to me and Sorel. Judith gave us to one another before we knew where we were.

JACKIE

How frightful!

SANDY

I like Sorel, though; she was jolly decent about it afterwards.

JACKIE

I think she's a cat.

SANDY

Why?

JACKIE

Look at the way she lost her temper over that beastly game.

SANDY

All the same, she's better than the others.

JACKIE

That wouldn't be very difficult.

SANDY

Hic!

JACKIE

I beg your pardon?

SANDY [*abashed*]

I say—I've got hiccoughs.

JACKIE

Hold your breath.

SANDY

It was because I bolted my breakfast.

[*He holds his breath.*]

JACKIE

Hold it as long as you can.

[*There is a pause.*]

SANDY [*letting his breath go with a gasp*]

I can't any more—hic!

JACKIE

Eat a lump of sugar.

SANDY [*taking one*]

I'm awfully sorry.

JACKIE

I don't mind—but it's a horrid feeling, isn't it?

SANDY

Horrid—hic!

JACKIE [*conversationally*]

People have died from hiccoughs, you know.

SANDY [*gloomily*]

Have they?

JACKIE

Yes. An aunt of mine once had them for three days without stopping.

SANDY

How beastly.

JACKIE [*with relish*]

She had to have the doctor, and everything.

SANDY

I expect mine will stop soon.

JACKIE

I hope they will.

SANDY

Hic!—There!

JACKIE

Drink some water the wrong way round.

SANDY

How do you mean—the wrong way round?

JACKIE [*rising*]

The wrong side of the glass. I'll show you. [*She goes to side table.*] There isn't any water.

SANDY

Perhaps coffee would do as well.

JACKIE

I've never tried coffee, but it might. [*She pours him out some.*] There you are.

SANDY [*anxiously*]

What do I do?

JACKIE

Tip it up and drink from the opposite side, sort of upside down.

SANDY [*trying*]

I can't reach any——

JACKIE [*suddenly*]

Look out—somebody's coming. Bring it into the library—quick. . . .

SANDY

Bring the sugar—I might need it again—hic
Oh God!

JACKIE

All right.

[*They go off into the library hurriedly. RICHARD comes downstairs. He glances round a trifle anxiously; then, pulling himself together, he goes boldly to the barometer and taps it. It falls off the wall and breaks; he picks it up quickly and places it on the piano. Then he helps himself to some breakfast, and sits down. MYRA appears on the stairs, very smart and bright.*]

MYRA [*vivaciously*]

Good morning.

RICHARD

Good morning.

MYRA

Are we the first down?

RICHARD

No, I don't think so.

MYRA [*looking out of the window*]

Isn't this rain miserable?

RICHARD

Appalling!

MYRA

Where's the barometer?

RICHARD

On the piano.

MYRA

What a queer place for it to be.

RICHARD

I tapped it, and it fell down.

MYRA

Typical of this house. [*At side table*] Are you having eggs and bacon, or haddock?

RICHARD

Haddock.

MYRA

I'll have haddock too. I simply couldn't strike out a line for myself this morning. [*She helps herself to haddock and coffee, and sits down opposite* RICHARD.] Have you seen anybody?

RICHARD

No.

MYRA

Good. We might have a little peace.

RICHARD

Have you ever stayed here before?

MYRA

No, and I never will again.

RICHARD

I feel far from well this morning.

MYRA

I'm so sorry, but not entirely surprised.

RICHARD

You see, I had the boiler room.

MYRA

How terrible!

RICHARD

The window stuck, and I couldn't open it—I was nearly suffocated. The pipes made peculiar noises all night, as well.

MYRA

There isn't any sugar.

RICHARD

Oh—we'd better ring.

MYRA

I doubt if it will be the slightest use, but we'll try.

RICHARD [*ringing and ringing bell*]

Do the whole family have breakfast in bed?

MYRA

I neither know—nor care.

RICHARD

They're strange people, aren't they?

MYRA

I think "strange" is putting it mildly.
[*Enter CLARA.*]

CLARA

What's the matter?

MYRA

There isn't any sugar.

CLARA

There is—I put it 'ere myself.

MYRA

Perhaps you'd find it for us, then?

CLARA [*searching*]

That's very funny. I could 'ave sworn on me Bible oath I brought it in.

MYRA

Well, it obviously isn't here now.

CLARA

Some one's taken it—that's what it is.

RICHARD

It seems a queer thing to do.

MYRA

Do you think you could get us some more?

CLARA

Oh yes, I'll fetch you some; but mark my words, there's been some 'anky-panky somewhere.

[She goes out.]

MYRA

Clara is really more at home in a dressing-room than a house.

RICHARD

Was she Judith's dresser?

MYRA

Of course. What other excuse could there possibly be for her?

RICHARD

She seems good-natured, but quaint.

MYRA

This haddock's disgusting.

RICHARD

It isn't very nice, is it?

[*Re-enter CLARA with sugar. She plumps it down.*]

CLARA

There you are, dear.

MYRA

Thank you.

CLARA

It's a shame the weather's changed—you might 'ave 'ad such fun up the river. [*There comes the sound of a crash from the library, and a scream.*]

What's that? [*She opens the door.*] Come out!

What are you doing?

[*JACKIE and SANDY enter, rather shamefaced.*]

JACKIE

Good morning. I'm afraid we've broken a coffee-cup.

CLARA

Was there any coffee in it?

SANDY

Yes, a good deal.

CLARA [*rushing into the library*]

Oh dear! all over the carpet!

SANDY

It was my fault. I'm most awfully sorry.

[CLARA *reappears*.]

CLARA

How did you come to do it?

JACKIE

Well, you see, he had the hiccoughs, and I was showing him how to drink upside down.

MYRA

How ridiculous!

CLARA

Well, thank 'Eaven it wasn't one of the Crown Derbys.

[*She goes out*.]

SANDY

They've gone now, anyhow.

JACKIE

It was the sudden shock, I expect.

SANDY [*observantly*]

I say—it's raining!

MYRA

It's been raining for hours.

RICHARD

Mrs. Arundel——

MYRA

Yes?

RICHARD

What are you going to do about—about to-day?

MYRA

Nothing, except go up to London by the first train possible.

RICHARD

Do you mind if I come too? I don't think I could face another day like yesterday.

JACKIE

Neither could I.

SANDY [*eagerly*]

Let's all go away—quietly!

RICHARD

Won't it seem a little rude if we *all* go?

MYRA

Yes it will. [To SANDY] You and Miss Coryton must stay.

JACKIE

I don't see why.

SANDY

I don't think they'd mind *very* much if we all went.

MYRA

Yes, they would. You must let Mr. Greatham and me get away first, anyhow. Ring for Clara. I want to find out about trains.

RICHARD

I hope they won't all come down now.

MYRA

You needn't worry about that; they're sure roll about in bed for hours—they're such a sloven family.

RICHARD

Have you got much packing to do?

MYRA

No; I did most of it before I came down.
[*Re-enter CLARA.*]

CLARA

What is it now?

MYRA

Can you tell me what trains there are up to London?

CLARA

When?

MYRA

This morning.

CLARA

Why?—you're not leaving, are you?

MYRA

Yes; Mr. Greatham and I have to be up by lunch
me.

CLARA

Well, you have missed the ten-fifteen.

MYRA

Obviously.

CLARA

There isn't another till twelve-thirty.

RICHARD

Good heavens!

CLARA

And that's a slow one.

She goes out.]

SANDY [*to JACKIE*]

Look here; I'll take you up in my car as soon as
you like.

JACKIE

All right; lovely!

MYRA

You've got a car, haven't you?

SANDY

Yes.

MYRA

Will it hold all of us?

JACKIE

You said it would be rude for us all to go. Hadn't you and Mr. Greatham better wait for the train?

MYRA

Certainly not.

RICHARD [*to* SANDY]

If there is room, we should be very, very grateful.

SANDY

I think I can squeeze you in.

MYRA

Then that's settled, then.

JACKIE

When shall we start?

SANDY

As soon as you're ready.

JACKIE

Mrs. Arundel, what are you going to do about tipping Clara?

MYRA

I don't know. [*To RICHARD*] What do you think?

RICHARD

I've hardly seen her since I've been here.

JACKIE

Isn't there a housemaid or anything?

RICHARD

I don't think so.

SANDY

Is ten bob enough?

JACKIE

Each?

MYRA

Too much.

RICHARD

We'd better give her one pound ten between us.

MYRA

Very well, then. Will you do it, and we'll settle up in the car?

RICHARD

Must I?

MYRA

Yes. Ring for her.

RICHARD

You'd do it much better.
[SANDY rings the bell.]

MYRA

Oh no, I shouldn't. [To JACKIE] Come on; we'll finish our packing.

JACKIE

All right.
[They begin to go upstairs.]

RICHARD

Here—don't leave me.

SANDY

I'll just go and look at the car. Will you all be ready in ten minutes?

MYRA

Yes, ten minutes.

[*She goes off with JACKIE.*]

SANDY

Righto.

[*He rushes out. CLARA re-enters.*]

CLARA

'Allo, where's everybody gone?

RICHARD

They've gone to get ready. We're leaving in Mr. Tyrell's car.

CLARA

A bit sudden, isn't it?

RICHARD [*pressing money into her hand*]

This is from all of us, Clara. Thank you very much for all your trouble.

CLARA [*surprised*]

Aren't you a dear, now! There wasn't any trouble.

RICHARD

There must have been a lot of extra work.

CLARA

One gets used to that 'ere.

RICHARD

Good-by, Clara.

He goes upstairs. CLARA proceeds to clear away the dirty breakfast things, which she takes out. She returns with a fresh pot of coffee, and meets JUDITH coming downstairs.]

JUDITH

Good morning, Clara. Have the papers come?

CLARA

Yes—I'll fetch them.

[*She goes out. JUDITH pours herself out some coffee, and sits down. CLARA re-enters with papers.*]

JUDITH

Thank you. You've forgotten my orange juice.

CLARA

No, I 'aven't, dear; it's just outside.

[*She goes out again. JUDITH turns to the theatrical column of the "Sunday Times." SOREL comes downstairs and kisses her.*]

SOREL

Good morning, darling.

JUDITH

Listen to this. [*She reads*] "We saw Judith Bliss in a box at the Haymarket on Tuesday, looking as lovely as ever." There now! I thought I looked hideous on Tuesday.

SOREL

You looked sweet.

[*She goes to get herself some breakfast. CLARA reappears, with a glass of orange juice.*]

CLARA [*placing it in front of JUDITH*]

Did you see that nice bit in the *Referee*?

JUDITH

No—the *Times*.

CLARA

The *Referee's* much better.

[*She finds the place and hands it to SOREL.*]

SOREL [*reading*]

“I saw gay and colorful Judith Bliss at the Waifs and Strays matinée last week. She was talking vivaciously to Producer Basil Dean. ‘I’ sooth,’ said I to myself, ‘where ignorance is Bliss, ’tis folly to be wise.’”

JUDITH [*taking it from her*]

Dear *Referee*! It's so unself-conscious.

CLARA

If you want any more coffee, ring for it.

[*She goes out.*]

SOREL [*sitting down*]

I wish I were sitting on a lovely South Sea island, with masses of palm trees and cocoanuts and turtles——

JUDITH

It would be divine, wouldn't it?

SOREL

I wonder where everybody is?

JUDITH [*still reading*]

I wonder. . . . Mary Saunders has got another failure.

SOREL

She must be used to it by now.

[*SIMON comes downstairs with a rush.*]

SIMON [*kissing JUDITH*]

Good morning, darling.—Look!

[*He shows her a newly completed sketch.*]

JUDITH

Simon! How lovely! When did you do it?

SIMON

This morning—I woke early.

SOREL [*rising and craning over JUDITH'S shoulder*]

Let's see.

SIMON [*over the other shoulder*]

I'm going to alter Helen's face; it's too pink.

SOREL [*laughing*]

It's exactly like her.

JUDITH

What a clever son I have!

SIMON

Now then, mother!

JUDITH

It's too wonderful—when I think of you both in your perambulators. . . . Oh dear, it makes me cry! [*She sniffs.*]

SOREL

I don't believe you ever saw us in our perambulators.

JUDITH

I don't believe I did.

[DAVID comes downstairs.]

DAVID [*hilariously*]

It's finished!

JUDITH

What, dear?

DAVID

The Sinful Woman.

JUDITH

How splendid. Read it to us now.

DAVID

I've got the last chapter here.

JUDITH

Go on, then.

[SANDY rushes in from the front door. On seeing everyone, he halts.]

SANDY

Good morning.

[*He bolts upstairs two at a time.*]

JUDITH

I seem to know that boy's face.

DAVID [*preparing to read*]

Listen. You remember when Violet was taken ill in Paris?

JUDITH

Yes, dear.—Marmalade, Simon.

DAVID

Well, I'll go on from there.

JUDITH

Do, dear.

DAVID [*reading*]

“Paris in spring, with the Champs Elysées alive and dancing in the sunlight; lightly dressed children like gay painted butterflies——”

SIMON [*whispering to SOREL*]

What's happened to the barometer?

SOREL [*sibilantly*]

I don't know.

DAVID

Damn the barometer!

JUDITH

Don't get cross, dear.

DAVID

Why can't you keep quiet, Simon, or go away!

SIMON

Sorry, father.

DAVID

Well, don't interrupt again. . . . [*Reading*]
". . . gay painted butterflies; the streets were thronged with hurrying vehicles, the thin peek-peek of taxi-hooters——"

SOREL

I love "peek-peek."

DAVID [*ignoring her*]

"——seemed to merge in with the other vivid noises weaving a vast pattern of sound which was

Paris. Jane Sefton, in her scarlet Hispano, swept out of the Rue St.-Honoré into the Place de la Concorde——”

JUDITH

She couldn't have.

DAVID

Why?

JUDITH

The Rue St.-Honoré doesn't lead into the Place de la Concorde.

DAVID

Yes, it does.

SOREL

You're thinking of the Rue Boissy d'Anglas, father.

DAVID

I'm not thinking of anything of the sort.

JUDITH

David darling, don't be obstinate.

DAVID [*hotly*]

Do you think I don't know Paris as well as you do?

SIMON

Never mind. Father's probably right.

SOREL

He isn't right—he's wrong!

DAVID

Go on with your food, Sorel.

JUDITH

Don't be testy, David: it's a sign of age.

DAVID [*firmly*]

"Jane Sefton, in her scarlet Hispano, swept out of the Rue St.-Honoré into the Place de la Concorde——"

JUDITH

That sounds absolutely ridiculous. Why don't you alter it?

DAVID

It isn't ridiculous; it's perfectly right.

JUDITH

Very well, then; get a map, and I'll show you.

SIMON

We haven't got a map.

DAVID [*putting his MS. down*]

Now, look here Judith—here's the Rue Royale—
[*He arranges the butter-dish and marmalade-pot.*]
—here's the Crillon Hotel, and *here's* the Rue St.
Honoré——

JUDITH

It isn't—it's the Boissy d'Anglas.

DAVID

That runs paralalled with the Rue de Rivoli.

JUDITH

You've got it all muddled.

DAVID [*loudly*]

I have *not* got it all muddled.

JUDITH

Don't shout. You have.

SIMON

Why not let father get on with it?

JUDITH

It's so silly to get cross at criticism—it indicates a small mind.

DAVID

Small mind my foot!

JUDITH

That was very rude. I shall go to my room in a minute.

DAVID

I wish you would.

JUDITH [*outraged*]

David!

SOREL

Look here, father, mother's right—here's the Place de la Concorde——

SIMON

Oh, shut up, Sorel.

SOREL

Shut up yourself, you pompous little beast.

SIMON

You think you know such a lot about everything, and you're as ignorant as a frog.

SOREL

Why a frog?

JUDITH

I give you my solemn promise, David, that you're wrong.

DAVID

I don't want your solemn promise, because I *know* I'm right.

SIMON

It's no use arguing with father, mother.

SOREL

Why isn't it any use arguing with father?

SIMON

Because you're both so pig-headed!

DAVID

Are you content to sit here, Judith, and let your son insult me?

JUDITH

He's your son as well as mine.

DAVID

I begin to doubt it.

JUDITH [*bursting into tears of rage*]

David!

SIMON [*consoling her*]

Father, how can you!

DAVID [*rising*]

I'll never attempt to read any of you anything again as long as I live. You're not a bit interested in my work, and you don't give a damn whether I'm a success or a failure.

JUDITH

You're dead certain to be a failure if you cram your books with inaccuracies.

DAVID [*hammering the table with his fist*]
I am not inaccurate!

JUDITH

Yes, you are; and you're foul-tempered and spoilt.

DAVID

Spoiled! I like that! Nobody here spoils me—you're the most insufferable family to live with——

JUDITH

Well, why in Heaven's name don't you go and live somewhere else?

DAVID

There's gratitude!

JUDITH

Gratitude for what, I'd like to know?

SOREL

Mother, keep calm.

JUDITH

Calm! I'm furious.

DAVID

What have you got to be furious about? Everyone rushing round adoring you and saying how wonderful you are——

JUDITH

I am wonderful, Heaven knows, to have stood you for all these years.

SOREL

Mother, do sit down and be quiet.

SIMON

How dare you speak to mother like that!

[During this scene MYRA, JACKIE, RICHARD, and SANDY creep downstairs, with their bags, unperceived by the family. They make for the front door.]

JUDITH *[wailing]*

Oh, oh! To think that my daughter should turn against me!

DAVID

Don't be theatrical.

JUDITH

I'm not theatrical—I'm wounded to the heart.

DAVID

Rubbish—rubbish—rubbish!

JUDITH

Don't you say Rubbish to me!

DAVID

I *will* say Rubbish!
[*Together.*]

SOREL

Ssshhh, father!

SIMON

That's right! Be the dutiful daughter and encourage your father——

DAVID

Listen to me, Judith——

JUDITH

Oh, this is dreadful—dreadful!

SOREL

The whole thing doesn't really matter in the least——

SIMON

——to insult your mother——

DAVID

The Place de la Concorde——

JUDITH

I never realized how small you were, David. You're tiny——

[*The universal pandemonium is suddenly broken by the front door slamming. There is dead silence for a moment, then the noise of a car is heard. SOREL runs and looks out of the window.*]

SIMON

There now!

SOREL

They've all gone!

JUDITH [*sitting down*]

How very rude!

DAVID [*also sitting down*]

People really do behave in the most extraordinary manner these days——

JUDITH

Come back and finish your breakfast, Sorel.

SOREL

All right.

[*She sits down.*]

SIMON

Toast, please, Sorel.

SOREL [*passing it to him*]

Here.

JUDITH

Go on, David; I'm dying to hear the end——

DAVID [*reading*]

“Jane Sefton, in her scarlet Hispano, swept out of the Rue Boissy d'Anglas into the Place Vêndome
——”

JUDITH

I meant to tell you before, David—I've made a great decision.

DAVID. [*amiably*]

What is it?

JUDITH

I really am going to return to the stage!

CURTAIN.



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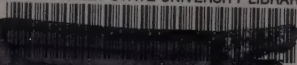
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